

PREACHING BIBLICAL TRUTH IN THE
CONTEMPORARY WORLD

A THESIS

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BY

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to the preaching of his Word. The goal of this work is to help preachers communicate God's life-giving truth in our contemporary culture.

To the Reverend Dr. Haddon Robinson and the Reverend Dr. Sid Buzzell and to the other class speakers I extend my gratitude for their faithfulness to their task of training preachers. These people have informed and inspired this preacher. Thank you.

There are many other people who deserve thanks. The leadership and members of the Port Alberni Christian Reformed Church have supported me financially and by giving me the time and encouragement to work on this project. Since I have recently moved the members of the Christ Community Church in Victoria, British Columbia have also allowed me time and encouraged me. In addition, one member of CCC Victoria, Ben Koning, has done much work to help with formatting this project. Things got confusing and Ben gave of his time and skills to help. Thanks Ben!

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Abstract

The goal of this thesis-project is to learn how we can effectively preach Biblical truth in contemporary western culture. The premise is that God's truth is still relevant but that we must be wise communicators of His truth. This paper will first look at some of the assumptions and characteristics of current society. Then, we will conduct a review of the current literature on preaching in this culture. Finally, interviews with some pastors on Vancouver Island will help with the goal of establishing guidelines for how to communicate God's life-giving truth in our contemporary culture.

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THESIS-PROJECT

PREACHING BIBLICAL TRUTH IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The goal of this thesis-project is to learn how we can effectively preach Biblical truth in contemporary western culture. We will look at some of the assumptions and characteristics of current society and then ask how we can best communicate God's truth today. This project will begin with a study of preaching in western society, in general, and then move to a study of preaching styles on Vancouver Island, in particular. The assumption throughout this project is that God's truth is relevant, and it can and must be preached effectively.

Since the goal is to learn how to preach biblical truth in our society we must define what we mean by biblical, objective truth. By biblical, objective truth the author means the truth about who God is and how God calls us to obey. In order to clarify this we will give two examples.

First, there are doctrinal truths. For example, Jesus is God, and belief in Him is

the only way to be saved. That truth is at the center of what evangelical Christians believe, and yet it is considered narrow and offensive in our society.

Second, there are biblical truths regarding obedience. One example is that the Bible teaches that sex outside of marriage is wrong. This truth is helpful for society, but it is, again, a truth that many people are unwilling to accept.

This thesis will argue that these truths are non-negotiable and that they apply to everyone. The truths being considered here are a subset of God's whole truth. There is, for example, the truth that God loves people. This is a biblical, objective truth, but it is probably not something that would be considered offensive. This thesis deals with the hard truths, the truths that many today find difficult to accept.

Why is God's objective truth so important? Kevin VanHoozer states that the church's situation regarding truth is similar to the situation of Elijah and the Israelites on Mt. Carmel. VanHoozer quotes Word Biblical Commentary:

The Northern Kingdom was going nowhere; it showed no awareness of a national destiny. Indeed, the eventual intrusion of Baalism suggests that Israel had very little sense of self-identity or covenantal calling. Apart from the external religious accouterments that lay on every side, this people's public life had become essentially secular.¹

VanHoozer says that we, like ancient Israel, are in danger of ignoring religious truth. He states that it is much easier to compromise the truth than it is to hold firmly to it. Yet, it is important that we teach objective truth because God's truth is vital for the health

¹ S. J. DeVries, *I Kings* (Waco, TX: WBC, Word, 1985), pp. xxiv-xxv.

of the church.² If we ignore God's truth we are in danger of becoming people who follow rituals but who have become essentially secular. When this happens we lose our ability to follow and know God because we no longer take what he says seriously.

Stephen Smallman says the following:

Today, in the first years of a new millennium, a multitude of issues are challenging the church, to say nothing of the chaos in our society as a whole. How shall we deal with matters such as sexual orientation, feminism, racism, environmentalism, human cloning, and genetic experimentation? At the root of these and other issues is the question, 'must we figure out these things for ourselves or do we have a word from God?' And we do! God has revealed his will in the Bible. Ignore that fundamental truth and the church will flounder, as is clearly happening to churches that deny the final authority of Scripture.³

The effective preaching of objective truth is also important for outreach. Many churches speak of visitors who come to their churches but who do not stay and allow themselves to be impacted by God's Word. These visitors listen to sermons but they don't allow the truth they hear to change their lives. It may be that one of the reasons these people leave is that they do not take the truths they hear seriously. These people need to hear God's message preached effectively.

The preacher lives and preaches in this culture. He feels the cultural resistance to God's truth, and yet he knows that God's instruction applies to everyone. The preacher wants to preach God's Word so that people will take it seriously. The goal of this project

² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Mapping Evangelical Theology in a Post-Modern World," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, January 1998, 12.

³ Stephan Smallman, What is a Reformed Church? (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P and R Publishing, 2003), 10.

is to learn how the preacher can get past postmodern resistance and preach God's challenging truth effectively.

How will this project proceed? Chapter two will explore Biblical and theological issues related to preaching truth. This will show in greater detail why God's challenging and life-giving truth is important. In addition, this chapter will examine society from a biblical perspective and look at biblical models for preaching truth.

The next part of this project will be the report on the research. The first part of the research, chapter three, will be a literature review of some of the best current writing on preaching truth in contemporary culture.

The second part of the research, chapter four, will consist of interviews with five pastors on Vancouver Island who are successfully reaching their culture. They will answer questions regarding how they preach truth and their thoughts will be compared with the current literature that is reviewed in chapter three. From this information we will develop a list of findings.

Next is a teaching plan that will communicate the results of this project. This material will be taught in the Leadership Development Network (LDN) of the author's church. The LDN is a system in Christian Reformed denomination which trains people to take on leadership positions in the church. Most of the people who are presently in this network are not in pastoral positions, but some hope to be in the future. This teaching experience will be evaluated by the participants, and possibilities for improvements will be noted.

The project will then be concluded with some final thoughts regarding preaching truth in this culture. These final thoughts will combine information learned from the literature, the interviews, and the teaching experience.

CHAPTER TWO

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The goal of this project is to understand what kind of preaching is effective in communicating objective truth. In this chapter, four biblical and theological questions will be asked to provide a foundation for the methods we will discuss later.

The questions are as follows:

1. Why is it important that we preach objective truth?
2. What is the source of the objective truth that we preach?
3. How does post-modern thinking compare with biblical thinking?
4. Is there a biblical basis for adjusting the message of the Bible to the culture?

PART ONE

Why is it important that we preach objective truth?

Is truth really important or are we making this a bigger issue than necessary? Most evangelical Christians believe that truth is important, but it will be helpful to list some reasons why this is so.

First, truth is important because our view of truth affects the way we understand God's character. If we fail to respect the truth that God has told us about himself then we fail to understand God's character.

We will note two important areas of God's character that our view of truth can affect. The way we think about truth affects our view of God's credibility. The issue of whether we can trust God is based on whether or not what He says is true. When we question truth in one area we have questioned God's credibility and that casts doubt on everything he has said.

In addition, the way we view what God has said is connected to our view of God's authority. God's Word is truth because God is truth and He has all authority. The idea of absolute authority and truth flows from the nature of God.⁴ The Bible has authority because God inspired it. Second Timothy 3:16, 17 says that, since Scripture comes from God, it is useful for teaching and correcting people. Scripture is useful for teaching and correcting because it comes from our God who has authority. Understanding God's truth is part of accepting His authority.

Of course we are looking here at what the Bible says about itself. Since the Bible is God's Word, it is God speaking about himself. Believing in this takes a step of faith and that step is difficult in our culture.

Second, truth is important theologically because we express love to God by obeying Him and honoring His truth. In Matthew 22:37 we read, "Jesus replied, 'Love

⁴ David A. Mappes, "A New Kind of Christian: A Review," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 2004): 295.

the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”⁵ John 14:15 tells us, “If you love me you will obey what I command.” This point is reiterated in John 14:21a, where Jesus says, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me...”

Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart. He then tells us that if we really love God we will obey him. Our obedience is tied to our love. The only way we can know how to obey is if we understand who God is and what His guidelines are.

Third, truth is important because we only know how to direct our lives if we take what God says seriously. We need to know God’s truth because of the reality of our sinful nature. Left unchecked, our sinful human nature leads us in a direction that is wrong and destructive.

Romans 8:7, 8 tells us that, “...The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.” Sinful human nature is opposed to God. Human beings need God’s truth but our sinful nature is opposed to this truth.

Because of our sinful nature it is hard for us to understand how to obey even if we want to. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. made this point in an article on preaching about sin. In showing that the path to obedience is often unclear to us he gave the example of the Haitian refugee crisis in the U.S. He noted that when U.S. citizens thought about these desperately poor people who got into rickety boats to come to America they were torn.

⁵ Unless otherwise noted Scripture references are from the New International Version.

They knew that if they were kind to these people many more would come. They knew that if they were somewhat firm and put the refugees in detention and sent most of them back they would slow the exodus but they wouldn't stop it. The only way to stop the people would have been to shoot at them, which would obviously be an unacceptable option. His point was that it is hard for us to know what to do. Sin has blinded our eyes, and it is not easy to see what is right.⁶

If someone is a non-Christian and a post-modern thinker, he may be hard to reach with objective truth. Such a person has a sinful condition and the cultural conditioning to make him resistant to authoritative truth.

A fourth reason that preaching God's truth is important theologically is that it is one way that we express love to our culture. In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus replies, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

In this passage we are called to love God with everything we are and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was and in His answer he gave two commandments. We can learn from this that while love for God comes first, yet love of God and love for people cannot be separated. There are many ways that we can and should love our neighbor but the most loving thing we can do is to reach out to our neighbors with the good news of God's truth.

⁶ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., "Preaching Sin to Reluctant Hearers," *Perspectives* (December 1997): 8, 9.

Preaching objective truth clearly is important because it affects the way we understand God and the way we express our love to him. It is important because as human beings we are deeply affected by sin and we need God's guidelines to direct us. In addition, preaching objective truth is important because God's truth is good and we express love to God's world by proclaiming God's truth.

PART TWO

What is the source of the objective truth that we preach?

The foundation of the truth we are speaking of here is the Bible. Since that is true, we must ask how we are to view the Bible. We note two passages that give us guidance: 2 Tim 3:16, 17 says, "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" and 2 Peter 1:20, 21 reads, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

These verses tell us that the Bible is God's Word and it is to be treated differently than any other literature that we read. We will note here some specifics about the nature of the Bible.

First we note that the Bible is the Word of God. Although the Bible was written by people those people were inspired by the Holy Spirit. In the Bible we see the personality of the writers, and yet we see that God spoke through those writers. Because of this the Bible is more than good advice, it is truth.

Second, the Bible is infallible. This means that the Bible is unfailing; it is always reliable and we can trust it to guide us in what we believe and in how we live. The Bible can be completely trusted as our teacher. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that the Bible is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training. Paul does not say that this is sometimes true but, rather, since the usefulness of the Bible flows from God's character, this is always true.⁷

Third, the Bible is sufficiently clear so that believers can understand its message well enough to be saved and to grow in faith by reading it. We certainly need Bible scholars, but we are not completely dependent on them. The Bible is God's authoritative word for his people. It is not just for those who have been trained in Hebrew and Greek; it is for all believers.⁸

It has never been easy for human nature to understand God's word and post-modernism is just another version of that problem. There is a gap between post-modern thinking and biblical thinking but God can still make his Word clear.

Fourth, the Bible is our only rule for life. The teachings in the Bible are what guide us, not the teachings that come from church leaders or church tradition. Of course, when leaders and tradition point us to the Bible they are helpful but we must always remember that the teachings of the Bible are the standard. The Bible, and only the Bible, is truly authoritative.⁹

⁷ Robert DeMoor, Reformed: What it Means – Why it Matters, (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2001), 29.

⁸ Ibid. 29.

⁹ Ibid. 29, 30.

Jesus says in Matthew 28:18b-20a,

...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.... (NIV)

Jesus makes a claim here to complete authority. Because of his authority, we are to make disciples and teach them to obey Jesus.

The Bible was authoritative when it was written and that authority still stands. Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” People and their ideas come and go, but God’s Word is permanent. In fact, the Bible makes a clear claim to authority in many places. Both Jesus and the writers of the New Testament spoke in terms of the absolute authority of the Bible. The phrase, “Thus saith the Lord,” appears over 400 times in the Old Testament and was intended to bring about absolute obedience. ¹⁰ This means that God’s Word is truth regardless of what post-modern people think.

Fifth, the Bible must be carefully interpreted. God communicates into our lives when we understand His word correctly. If we misunderstand the intent of the Bible we fail to really hear God and we impose our own views on it. It is possible to understand the Bible, but it takes thought and prayer to understand it clearly and to know how to apply it to our lives. ¹¹

¹⁰ Mappes, “A New Kind of Christian: A Review,” 294.

¹¹ DeMoor, Reformed: What it Means – Why it Matters, 30.

Because of the challenge of interpretation, preachers have a great responsibility to study the text carefully and prayerfully so that we truly communicate God's message to our community. 2 Timothy 2:15 says the following: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." This is a call to Timothy and to each of us to be diligent as we handle God's Word.

Fortunately, we do not interpret the Bible alone; God has provided us with help in understanding His Word by giving us his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible and apply it to our lives. John 16:12, 13 says, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

Two concluding notes apply to our understanding of the Bible. First, God's word is clearly truth that we are to obey, but God does not give us his absolute truth simply because he wants to control us. God is not trying to extinguish any enjoyment that we may have. God's truth is good. When we ignore God's guidelines we damage our lives; when we follow God's guidelines we promote joy in our lives. Jesus says in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Second, we preach objective truth from God's authoritative word in the context of a relationship with God. If we only focus on written objective truth we may become unbalanced. God's truth in our lives is crucial, but our relationship with God is more than understanding some facts about God or some instructions that he has given. God calls us

into an intimate relationship with Him where we call Him, Abba Father.¹² We are His children and He cares deeply for us. It is important that we understand and appreciate God's truth, and it is also important that we understand the relational nature of Christianity.

PART THREE

How does post-modern thinking compare with biblical thinking?

We are now in a culture that many call postmodern. Because of this reality we will discuss what some current writers believe about how postmodern thinking agrees and disagrees with biblical thinking.

Postmodern thinking agrees with the Bible in its distrust of enlightenment (modern) thinking about knowledge. We will note four ways in which the postmodern attitude toward knowledge and the Bible's attitude toward knowledge are in partial agreement.

1) Postmodern thinkers are in partial agreement with the Bible regarding the certainty of knowledge. Modern thinking tended to see knowledge as certain. In addition it assumed that the criterion for certainty rests with our human rational capabilities. Postmodern thinking questions this, and the Bible also questions it. The Bible denies that

¹² Romans 8:15,16, NIV (New International Version)

the rational scientific method is the only measure of truth. Both Christians and postmodern thinkers affirm that there are some aspects of truth that lie beyond reason.¹³

2) Postmodern thinkers question the enlightenment assumption that knowledge is objective and dispassionate. They believe that we are part of our environment and, therefore, we cannot be completely objective. The biblical record also reflects that knowledge is gained as part of a culture. We observe cultural influence in the nature of the Bible. It was composed by people of a specific time and place, and yet we can see that they too were products of their culture. Again we see that there is some agreement between postmodern thinking and biblical thinking.¹⁴

3) Postmodern thinking rejects the Enlightenment assumption that knowledge is inherently good. Postmodern thinking is in agreement with the teaching of the Bible on this. The events of the twentieth century make it clear to us that technological advances bring evil as well as good. For example, the ability to split the atom was an advance in knowledge that also resulted in much destruction and suffering. Christians are not surprised by this. The Bible says that we are sinful people¹⁵ and, therefore, while increased knowledge provides more opportunity for good, it also provides more opportunity for evil.¹⁶

¹³ Stanley J. Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) 165.

¹⁴ Ibid. 166.

¹⁵ Romans 3:23

¹⁶ Grenz, A Primer On Postmodernism, 166

4) Postmodern thinking says that in addition to objective truth we need the experiential, relational side of our relationship with God. This again, is in agreement with the Bible. The Bible calls us to objective knowledge of God and also into a love relationship with him. Christians in the modern era tended to emphasize guilt and justification, but many did not think enough about the relational part of our faith. Postmodern thinking is a helpful corrective to that.¹⁷

Jimmy Long deals with this when he talks about the meaning of the word belief. He states that belief used to mean to rely on or to trust in someone as well as to give intellectual assent. During the Enlightenment the word belief lost its meaning of trusting in, and it came to mean only intellectual assent. Long believes that this change in the meaning of the word belief is connected to the fact that Christians have emphasized the intellectual side of Christianity more than the relational side.¹⁸

While postmodern thinking agrees to some degree with Biblical thinking, that is not to say they agree completely. We are simply saying that postmodern and Biblical thinking identify the same problems with modern assumptions. In each case cited above we can see agreement between postmodern thinking and Biblical thinking, but we can also see disagreement.

We note one area of tension between biblical and the postmodern view of truth. Postmodern thinking claims that all truth is suspect and relative. But while the Bible recognizes the limitations of our knowledge, it also recognizes the reality of objective

¹⁷ Jimmy Long, Emerging Hope (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 103.

¹⁸ Ibid. 112.

truth. For example, throughout the Gospels we see that people had difficulty understanding what Jesus was saying, and yet Jesus continued to say that He is the truth.¹⁹ Humans are limited, but that does not affect the reality of truth. In its suspicion of Enlightenment rationality, postmodern thinking has gone too far and thrown out objective truth. The Bible still says, “Your Word is truth.”^{20 21}

One important thing to emphasize again is that, although we may disagree with things in culture, we also recognize that God reveals His truth in culture. This means that we do not just look at culture with condemnation, but we ask ourselves how God’s truth is revealed through it. Genesis 1:27 says, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Since people are created in God’s image they reflect some of God’s truth. Because of the effect of sin God’s image in people is broken but it is not destroyed. These people who carry God’s image make up our culture. Culture then, including postmodern culture, sometimes confuses God’s truth but it also reveals God’s truth.

PART FOUR

Is there a biblical basis for adjusting the message of the Bible to the culture?

¹⁹ John 14:6

²⁰ Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 6.

²¹ Long, Emerging Hope, 103.

Since we are considering adjusting the presentation of the biblical message in this thesis so that people can better understand the gospel, we need to explore what the Bible says about adjusting methods to the culture. Asking if we need to change our methods addresses the question of how God chooses to work in the world. Do we need to change our methods or do we simply keep doing what we have been doing and let God do the work?²²

There are further questions that we must ask. How much change is appropriate? May we change only the method or can the content itself also be altered? How do we protect the core content so that we continue to preach the true Gospel?²³

Lesslie Newbigin highlights a caution regarding the changes we may consider. He notes that when he was in India he would often spend time in the monastery, sitting on the floor with the monks and studying with them. In the monastery there is a gallery of portraits of great religious teachers and among them is a picture of Jesus. Every year on Christmas day there was worship before this picture, and Jesus was honored as one of the manifestations of God in human history.

Newbigin states that he came to understand that this was not a step toward the conversion of India; it was domesticating Jesus into a Hindu worldview. This practice was hindering the message of the Gospel. He states that a similar “domestication of Jesus” has taken place in other parts of the world.²⁴

²² Glenn T. Stanton, “The Postmodern Moment,” *Christianity Today* (June 10, 2002): 53.

²³ Brad Smith, Preaching that Mobilizes a Church Community to Reach an Unchurched Postmodern Community for Christ, Chapter 2, 11.

²⁴ Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, 3.

We must guard against this. We want to make changes so that the message of the Gospel is clear to the culture, and yet we must be careful that we do not compromise our worldview and become like the world around us. Otherwise, we may actually be a hindrance to the proclamation of the Good news of Jesus.

We observe first, the style that Jesus used in teaching. Jesus used a vocabulary that showed a broad understanding of culture. For example, he referred to hypocrites a number of times in the Gospels. The word hypocrite is a term from the theater. We don't know if Jesus attended the theater but he was familiar enough with it to use the language. When he referred to hypocrites He was using the language of the culture.²⁵

Jesus was also sometimes quite uncompromising in his approach. John 6, for example, a crowd of people followed Jesus because of the miraculous signs he had done. Jesus responded by feeding all of them with five small barley loaves and two small fish. After that there was the beginning of a movement to see Jesus as a prophet and possibly a king. Jesus distanced himself from this and left the crowd. The crowd eventually found Jesus and he responded by saying some difficult things to them. This caused many of his disciples to stop following him. In this case Jesus did not give the answers the people wanted to hear just to draw a crowd but, rather, he gave difficult answers because the truth is important.²⁶

²⁵ Ray Vander Laan, "Faith Lessons on the Life and Ministry of the Messiah; Language of the Culture." (Colorado Springs, CO.: Focus on the Family, 1996), VHS.

²⁶ Vander Laan, "Faith Lessons on the Life and Ministry of the Messiah; Language of the Culture."

Brad Smith also helps us see how Jesus adapted his presentation to his audience. Smith points out that Jesus was the “color of his culture.” He knew how to fit in with many different types of people. He dealt with the questions people had, and He used illustrations they could understand. Jesus told a number of parables that showed God’s desire to enter the culture and draw people to himself. Jesus even said that the religious leaders of the day would miss out on kingdom blessings because they stayed isolated from the culture.

In addition to this Jesus tailored his message to people personally. He understood what people needed, and he spoke to their needs. Jesus asked questions and listened to people’s responses. He based his challenges to people on what they could handle. Jesus met people at their level of understanding and in their place of comfort, and yet He pressed for radical faith and obedience.²⁷

This suggests that we are to understand culture and use the language of the culture as we teach and preach. Jesus did not change the meaning of the message, but he presented it in a way that was culturally understandable.

We can also learn about Jesus’ methods by thinking about his Incarnation. When Jesus came into this world God revealed himself in a way that was best able to communicate to people: Jesus entered our world and became one of us. God now calls us

²⁷ Smith, Preaching that Mobilizes a Church Community to Reach an Unchurched Postmodern Community for Christ, Chapter 2, p. 10, 11.

to continue that work by making Jesus known to people. We are called to proclaim the Gospel and to imitate Jesus' method.²⁸

Chris Altrock says the following regarding how we are to follow Jesus' example:

Each preacher proclaims the gospel in a unique way, shaped by one's personality, experiences, and communication patterns....But the "flesh" of the messenger is not the only "flesh" in which the proclaimed gospel is wrapped, however. The gospel is also wrapped in a "flesh" influenced by the listener's culture. For instance, for the Jews of Acts 13, Paul "dressed" the gospel in the "flesh" of Jewish history. For the Lycaonians of Acts 14, Paul "dressed" the gospel in the "flesh" of cosmology....In each case the core message, the gospel, was the same. It was contextualized or incarnated into a different form, however, for each audience.²⁹

We have been considering the way that Jesus communicated his message. We move now to some specific texts that illustrate how the presentation of biblical truth can be adjusted to culture. The first text we will examine is Paul's sermon in Athens in Acts 17:16-34. At this time Paul was in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy. While there he saw many idols in the city and this troubled Paul. He began to speak to people and eventually he was invited to speak in the Areopagus. Paul began his message there by referring to their altar to the "unknown god." From that beginning Paul preached a message about the true God. That incident is an example of changing methods for the culture while still preaching the same unchanging truth about God.

Charles Colson speaks about this passage in How Now Shall We Live. He notes that the Greeks had no knowledge of scripture and the concepts of sin and redemption

²⁸ Chris Altrock, Preaching to Pluralists (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004), 45-47.

²⁹ Altrock, Preaching to Pluralists, 46.

were not familiar to them. They did believe in a group of deities who operated from human passions. Because Paul knew this he began his speech in Athens by speaking about the unknown god. In verse 28 Paul quoted poets that they knew. Paul appealed to the experience and literature of the audience to help them understand the Biblical message. Even when Paul did start to talk about the Gospel he began by talking about creation. He then argued that since God made everything he is not like a gold or silver idol made by a person. Paul first established who God is and why we are responsible to him before he talked about repentance and the resurrection. Colson concludes by stating that we cannot rely on what some people call the “simple Gospel.” God calls us to love people enough to go where they are both physically and conceptually. He states that we need to listen to questions people ask and then give answers they can understand. As time goes on we become more like aliens in our own culture, and we need to continue to learn to speak the language of the culture. Again, this is support for changing our methods to communicate the unchanging truth of the Gospel.³⁰

Peter illustrates the need for cultural awareness again in Acts 2, which gives us the Pentecost account and Peter’s address to the Jewish crowd. This message is different from Paul’s message in Acts 17. In Acts 17 Paul appeals to the culture of Athens whereas in Acts 2 Peter appeals to a Jewish crowd. These people were from many different places but their thinking was Jewish. Peter makes references to Old Testament prophecies and to

³⁰ Charles Colson, and Nancy Pearcey, How Now Shall We Live (Wheaton, Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 30, 31.

King David. He spoke in a way that they understood and yet he spoke a clear and sharp message.

In Acts 2 and 17 we see two messages, both of which present the Gospel but which do so differently. The difference in form is a result of differences in the audience.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul continues to elaborate on this idea:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Here, Paul states that he is free, and he then says that because of his freedom he can change his behavior based on the people he is with. He is willing to make changes in his behavior in matters that do not violate biblical principles. That probably means that sometimes he complied with Jewish thinking and sometimes he did not. Paul wants the Gospel go out, and because of that he is willing to become all things to all people in matters that are secondary. This supports the belief that we can give up or change non-essential things in order to communicate the Gospel.³¹

Yet, Paul does not compromise the core message of the Bible for his listeners:

I know very well how foolish the message of the cross sounds to those who are on the road to destruction. But we who are being saved recognize this message as the very power of God....This "foolish" plan of God is far wiser

³¹ Gordon D. Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament – The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 422-433.

than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is far stronger than the greatest of human strength.³² (1Corinthians 1:18, 25) NLT

And again in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

Dear brothers and sisters, when I first came to you I didn't use lofty words and brilliant ideas to tell you God's message.² For I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.³ I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling.⁴ And my message and my preaching were very plain. I did not use wise and persuasive speeches, but the Holy Spirit was powerful among you.⁵ I did this so that you might trust the power of God rather than human wisdom. NLT

One issue in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians is the question of what true wisdom is. Paul recognizes that people naturally see life from a human perspective. From that human perspective God's ways often look foolish. Yet when we see things from God's perspective we see that his ways are the ultimate wisdom. The preacher must understand that God's ways will look foolish until God changes a person's heart. This would lead us to believe that there is little reason to change our methods because God's ways look foolish to the secular world.³³

There is also the issue of the professional orators who were popular during Paul's day and who would have been well known in the city of Corinth. These orators were highly skilled in their ability to captivate and persuade a crowd. They used standard skills and those skills were respected.

³² New Living Translation; hereafter NLT.

³³ Duane Litfin, St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 174-178.

Paul did not use these same skills because he believed that the power of the Christian message was in God's power rather than in human persuasiveness.^{34 35} In the same way, the power of the preacher's message in our time does not lie in our persuasive skills or in the flashiness of our presentation. We are called to present the Gospel message but only God can persuade people. Again, this would lead us to think that we should not adjust our message because the results are up to God.

Next we look at 1 Corinthians 14:23, 24:

Even so, if unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting and hear everyone talking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy.²⁴ But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin, and they will be condemned by what you say. As they listen, their secret thoughts will be laid bare, and they will fall down on their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is really here among you."
NLT

In chapter fourteen Paul criticizes the Corinthians for speaking in their services in ways that non-Christians cannot understand. Paul says that speaking in this way can ultimately cause an unbeliever to reject Christianity. He goes on to say that if they speak in a way that unbelievers can understand they will fall down in their knees in worship. This seems to tell us that there are ways to communicate that hinder God's work, and there are ways that promote God's work.

³⁴ Ibid. 196.

³⁵ Altrock, Preaching to Pluralists, 38.

When we take 1 Corinthians 1 and 14 together we see a tension.

Conversion happens because of God's power, but we also have a responsibility to speak in a way that is understandable.³⁶

We live with this tension. God does the work of converting people. At the same time we see that God uses preaching as one powerful way to communicate his message. We are to intentionally preach in a way that people can understand.³⁷

In 2 Timothy, Paul enlightens us further on his understanding of preaching:

“What you have heard from me keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you - guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Timothy 1:13, 14. NIV).

Donald Guthrie notes that the word translated here as “pattern” – hypotyposis – means a sketch such as an architect might make before drawing the detailed plans of a building. He draws from this that Paul is saying that his teaching is a guide to follow, but it is not something to memorize and mimic exactly. Timothy is to use Paul's teaching as a basis: he is to guard the content, but he is free to adjust the methods. Timothy has a responsibility to teach God's truth, and, at the same time, God promises that he, through the work of the Holy Spirit, will give guidance.

Paul also says that Timothy is to do this with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Guthrie claims that the words “with faith and love” qualify the way Timothy is to hold on to the sound teaching. In other words, Timothy is to continue in the truth of what Paul has

³⁶ Ibid. 38, 39.

³⁷ Ibid. 38-42.

taught, but the way he does that is to be tempered with faith and love. Timothy is to live and teach objective truth, but his methods are to be filled with faith in God and love for both God and people. Again, this tells us that we are to teach God's truth, but we are to do so in a way that expresses love and respect for our culture.³⁸

We can summarize by saying that God calls us to trust in His work and proclaim His Word. We need to do this by staying faithful to God's truth. God has given us his truth and the reality and effectiveness of this truth never changes. We also need to understand our culture and preach the truth in a way that communicates clearly. That does not mean that we compromise the message. Our call is to preach the eternal truths of God's Word in a way that clearly communicates the message of the Gospel story. While our methods may need to change, God's truth always stays the same.

We close this section with a quote from Erwin Rapheal McManus: "Relevance is not about conformity; it is about clarity and connectedness."³⁹ We are not to conform to culture but it is our responsibility to understand culture and to ask how we can communicate to culture.

The goal of this chapter has been to think through the relationship of God's truth and culture from a theological perspective. In the next chapter we will look at current literature on the postmodern culture and on preaching in this culture.

³⁸ Donald Guthrie, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – The Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 145.

³⁹ Erwin R. McManus, The Church in Emerging Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 240.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

We move now to a review of current literature on preaching objective truth in the postmodern world. Although there is a great deal of writing about preaching in the postmodern world, the focus of the literature cited here is on how we preach truth in our current culture. That is not to say that all writing cited mentions objective truth but it is to say that this review is done from the perspective of asking how we can effectively preach objective truth.

This chapter will be divided into three parts. Part one will look at literature that describes postmodern culture. Part two will be a survey of current literature on preaching objective truth to our culture. Part three will look at literature on the kind of lifestyle the preacher is called to live and how that is related to preaching truth.

PART ONE

What is Postmodernism?

The postmodern mind is difficult to define. We will look at some of the many attempts that have been made, including one well known and fairly technical work on postmodern thinking, A Primer on Postmodernism by Stanley Grenz. This book looks at the development of postmodernism, and it discusses the Gospel in the postmodern context.

In beginning his definition of postmodernism the author says, “Postmodernism refers to an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set.”⁴⁰ Grenz continues his definition by stating that post-modern thinking has abandoned the Enlightenment belief in inevitable progress. Postmodern people do not have the optimism of the previous generation. In fact, sometimes they have a “gnawing pessimism.” Postmodern people see problems mounting, and they believe that life on earth is fragile.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, A Primer On Postmodernism (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 12.

⁴¹ Ibid. 13

In addition to this skeptical view of the future, the postmodern consciousness operates with a different view of truth than the previous generation. Grenz states the following:

The modern understanding linked truth with rationality and made reason and logical argumentation the sole arbiters of right belief. Postmoderns question the concept of universal truth discovered and proved through rational endeavors. They are unwilling to allow the human intellect to serve as the sole determiner of what we should believe. Postmoderns look beyond reason to nonrational ways of knowing, conferring heightened status on the emotions and intuition.⁴²

Connected to their view of truth is the fact that postmodern thinkers are keenly aware of the importance of community. Postmodern thinking emphasizes wholeness, and they believe that part of wholeness is being in community.

This emphasis on community leads postmoderns to a corporate and local understanding of the truth. They believe that our concept of truth is rooted in the community we are part of and, therefore, that truth is not universal and timeless. Postmoderns believe that truth comes as a result of ground rules that bring about personal and community well being. This means that truth can differ from one community to another, which brings about relativism, pluralism and diversity.⁴³

Grenz goes on to state that post-modernism marks a new way of understanding reality. It is a revolution in the way we think about knowledge and in the way we view science. Postmodernism, according to Grenz, is the end of an all-encompassing worldview. Grenz states the following:

⁴² Ibid. 13, 14

⁴³ Ibid. 14

In a sense, postmoderns have no worldview. A denial of the reality of a unified world as the object of our perception is at the heart of postmodernism. Postmoderns reject the possibility of constructing a single correct worldview and are content simply to speak of many views and, by extension, many worlds. By replacing the modern worldview with a multiplicity of views and worlds, the postmodern era has in effect replaced knowledge with interpretation.⁴⁴

Later Grenz says,

The postmodern understanding of knowledge, therefore, is built on two foundational assumptions: (1) postmoderns view all explanations of reality as constructions that are useful but not objectively true, and (2) postmoderns deny that we have the ability to step outside our constructions of reality.⁴⁵

Postmodern thinking denies any single unifying truth around which the world has been built; they proclaim the end of the metanarrative. The postmodern outlook attacks any claim to universal truth.⁴⁶

Another excellent book on understanding the postmodern mind is The Gospel in a Pluralist Society by Leslie Newbigin. Although published in 1989, this book is helpful in understanding postmodern thinking by examining the overall setting of our pluralist society.

One of the most helpful parts of this book is the author's discussion of how our world is similar and dissimilar to the world of Bible times. We live in a pluralistic society, much like that in which the Bible was written. At the same time, we live in a global society and understand that we are dependant on each other, which makes us different than earlier societies. Newbigin says,

⁴⁴ Ibid. 40

⁴⁵ Ibid. 43

⁴⁶ Ibid. 45.

The first photographs beamed back to earth from the moon gave us a vivid sense that our planet is not an inexhaustible area in which there will always be fresh frontiers to cross and free space to occupy, but a small and fragile spacecraft in which we are condemned to live together or else perish together. This sense of the paramount need for human unity is one of the genuinely new facts of our time – at least insofar as it now embraces the whole globe. In the face of this need, the claim of one group to have the truth for all is seen as potentially disastrous.⁴⁷

The author shows that pluralism is not only seen now as part of life, it is seen as a necessity for survival. Someone who thinks that they have the truth for all is seen as dangerous.

A third book dealing with the postmodern culture is Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World, by Craig Loscalzo. Much of the book is about preaching, but chapter one gives a brief description of the postmodern mind. He lists the following characteristics of postmodernism:

- Postmodern thinkers have a love hate relationship with technology.
- Postmodern thinkers are skeptical about objectivity.
- Postmodern thinkers love a variety of choices.
- Postmodern thinkers appreciate community.
- Postmodern thinkers have a hermeneutic of suspicion.⁴⁸

This chapter gives a basic understanding of the postmodern mind that will eventually be helpful in thinking about how to preach in a postmodern culture.

One writer who is well known for his works on postmodernism is Brian McLaren. McLaren is the founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church in the Washington-Baltimore area. He is also a popular speaker and the author of a number of books. Two of

⁴⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 157

his more recent books are A New Kind of Christian⁴⁹ and The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of A New Kind Of Christian.⁵⁰ These books are written as a story and a dialogue, but they are a description of postmodernity. The goal of these books is to think through a new way of being a Christian in today's world. McLaren pushes some theological limits, but he also asks some important questions.

A third book by Brian McLaren is entitled The Church On The Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix. McLaren states in this book that rank-and-file post-moderns do believe in absolute truth. What they doubt is any one person's ability to comprehend that truth. In other words, they don't reject absolute truth, but they reject absolute knowledge. McLaren also notes that postmoderns care about truth. He claims that they care so much about truth that they question any one person's view on it, and they question the ability of language to convey it sufficiently.⁵¹

McLaren has also co-written with Tony Campolo a helpful chapter in a book entitled Adventures in Missing the Point. In a chapter entitled "Being Postmodern," McLaren states the following:

A lot of people seem to think that since modernity was rationalistic, postmodernity must be either antirational or irrational. No, that's antimodernity, not postmodernity. Postmodernity more likely seeks to integrate rationality with things beyond rationality – things like imagination, intuition, and faith. In fact, if the medieval era is seen as an era of faith...

⁴⁸ Craig A. Loscalzo, Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 15-19.

⁴⁹ Brian D. McLaren, A New Kind of Christian (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2001)

⁵⁰ Brian D. McLaren, The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2003)

⁵¹ Brian D. McLaren, The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998, 2000), 167.

and the modern era an era of reason..., we could expect the postmodern era to be a synthesis of faith and reason.⁵²

He goes on to say the following:

Furthermore, since modernity was all about progress and optimism, then (some conclude) postmodernity will be about despair and pessimism. Not quite. Early modernity was perhaps more generally optimistic about human progress. But late modernity (after World War II) became cynical, jaded, disillusioned about progress – at least among most intellectuals. Postmodernity, I expect, will emerge as something both optimistic and pessimistic about progress – a synthesis, not a rejection.⁵³

McLaren helps readers achieve a balanced and more positive view of post-modernism. Postmodernism has problems, as does every human way of thinking, but postmoderns ask some thoughtful questions. McLaren also reminds us that the categories are not as clean and simple as they look on paper. Postmodernism is a way of thinking that we should look at critically and that we should value.

Another interesting book on this topic is The Post Evangelical by Dave Tomlinson. This book calls into question the traditional way of reading the Bible and of thinking about faith. It helps readers think through their faith by asking perceptive questions, but it also questions many of the basics of our faith. According to Tomlinson, a post-evangelical is someone who was formerly an evangelical but has moved beyond the "limitations" of evangelicalism. Although this book uses different terminology, it

⁵² Brian D. McLaren, and Tony Campolo, Adventures in Missing the Point (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003), 252.

⁵³ Ibid. 252.

emphasizes again that post-moderns are suspicious of pre-packaged answers, and they want to think issues through carefully.⁵⁴

Leonard Sweet is another author who is helpful in understanding the postmodern mind. One of his books entitled Aqua Church is primarily about leadership, but it does have some helpful insights:

If the Modern Era was a rage for order, regulation, stability, singularity and fixity, the Postmodern Era is a rage for chaos, uncertainty, otherness, openness, multiplicity, and change. Postmodern surfaces are not landscapes but wavescapes, with the waters always changing and the surface never the same. The sea knows no boundaries.⁵⁵

Regarding the postmodern attitude toward spirituality Sweet says the following:

Postmoderns are anti-religious but deeply spiritual. Postmodern culture is filled with day trippers asking for direction,...but all scouring the horizon for hope, wonder, and a way out of their mazes of aimless living. Say “I’m a Christian” to these pilgrims, and they flee for their lives. Say, “I’m a disciple of Jesus,” and they gather ‘round to hear more....”⁵⁶

Sweet has also edited a book entitled The Church in Emerging Culture. This book gives perspectives on postmodernism from five excellent authors: Andy Crouch, Michael Horton, Frederica Mathewes-Green, Brian McLaren, and Erwin Raphael McManus. The authors give their own perspective, and they also dialogue with each other in this book.⁵⁷

Culture Shift by David Henderson is another book that is helpful for understanding post-modern culture. Henderson gives detailed and interesting descriptions of our culture throughout the book. In describing the current culture he says we are

⁵⁴ Dave Tomlinson, The Post Evangelical (Great Britain, Triangle, 1995).

⁵⁵ Leonard Sweet, Aqua Church (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing Inc., 1999), 24.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 41.

⁵⁷ Leonard Sweet, ed., The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003)

consumers, spectators, self-absorbed individuals, beyond God, beyond right and wrong, and beyond meaning and purpose. Henderson's book describes the present situation well. It helps the preacher understand the needs people have, and it gives guidance for how to deal with those needs.⁵⁸

Another book that gives a clear description of postmodern culture is Christian Witness In A Postmodern World by World Harry Lee Poe. This book gives a thorough explanation of postmodern thinking. Poe describes the postmodern world as one in which people are personally focused, politically alienated, philosophically confused and theologically ignorant.⁵⁹

Scott Gibson has also written some interesting comments on the present culture in his chapter in the book Preaching to a Shifting Culture. Gibson notes that there is a lack of respect for authority in our current society. He also notes that this lack of respect for authority has permeated the evangelical church. He quotes Dallas Willard as follows:

The 'open secret' of many 'Bible believing' churches is that a vanishingly small percentage of those talking about prayer and Bible reading are actually doing what they are talking about.⁶⁰

He goes on to say the following about sermons:

...Sermons have become antidotes to bruised egos, lists of how-to's, topical discussions on any number of themes – but not biblically centered expositions of what the Bible said to the people and the culture to which it was written and what it says to men and women today.⁶¹

⁵⁸ David W. Henderson, Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998)

⁵⁹ Harry Lee Poe, Christian Witness In A Postmodern World (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001)

⁶⁰ Scott M. Gibson, Preaching to a Shifting Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 220.

⁶¹ Ibid. 220.

Gibson's remarks help us see that postmodern thinking is not just something that is "out there." The church is part of the culture, and we are affected by trends in the culture. We follow the trends in culture in ways that many of us are not aware of.

There are also many articles that can help us understand postmodernism. Leadership Journal ran an article entitled "Ministering with 'My Generation': What We've Learned (So Far) from Postmodern Churches." In this article Eric Reed defines postmodern ministry as something that can look haphazard but focused. He defines postmoderns as people who are "non-linear, multi-sensory thinkers, whose synaptic patterns are more like the Internet than the encyclopedia." ⁶²

Reed encourages leaders to welcome younger postmoderns into the church and to be ready for how they will change the church. He notes the following effects that postmoderns will have:

- They will bring a quest for authenticity.
- They will promote community.
- They emphasize the joy of the journey.
- They believe in a, "roll up your sleeves" faith.
- They believe in participation. ⁶³

In another article on postmodernism entitled "The Riddle of Our Postmodern Culture" David Goetz makes some helpful comments. Goetz says that postmodernism shows itself in syncretism. He says that one may "Add a dash of Zen Buddhism and a

⁶² Eric Reed, "Ministering with 'My Generation,'" *Leadership Journal*, Vol. XXI (Fall 2000), 50-51.

⁶³ Ibid. 54.

dash of Native American religion to one's nominal Christian or Jewish beliefs."⁶⁴ Post-modern thinkers enjoy variety, and they are not concerned about theological differences.

Goetz agrees with other authors in stating that postmodernism shows itself in the cultural pessimism that we see. We see this pessimism in popular art, in movies and in the cynicism of politicians and the political process revealed in the voter apathy that we now see.

Goetz sees opportunities in postmodernism. He says that postmodernism has shown us that our ideas rise in a context. Understanding this helps to guard against cultural arrogance. Goetz also states that, since postmodernism is a climate of searching, it is a great opportunity for the church and for preaching.⁶⁵

Hopefully this variety of definitions helps to enhance our understanding of post-modern culture. We will include one more book in this section by a secular author. The book is entitled Under The Banner of Heaven, and it is written by Jon Krakauer. The writer's goal was not to define post-modernism, but he does give a good example of post-modern thinking. Krakauer's book is about the murder of a woman and her daughter in 1984. The murder was committed by Mormon fundamentalists, and the book is a study of the Mormon faith and how Mormonism could lead to murder.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 3.

We sense in the book a distrust of religion in general. When reading this book we can hear in it the postmodern distrust of religion. We can also sense a strong need for God, particularly in the following comments taken from the appendix:

I don't know what God is, or what God had in mind when the universe was set in motion. In fact, I don't know if God even exists, although I confess that I sometimes find myself praying in times of great fear, or despair, or astonishment at a display of unexpected beauty.

There are some ten thousand extant religious sects – each with its own cosmology, each with its own answer for the meaning of life and death. Most assert that the other 9,999 not only have it completely wrong but are instruments of evil, besides. None of the ten thousand has yet persuaded me to make the requisite leap of faith. In the absence of conviction, I've come to terms with the fact that uncertainty is an inescapable corollary of life. An abundance of mystery is simply part of the bargain – which doesn't strike me as something to lament. Accepting the essential inscrutability of existence, in any case, is surely preferable to its opposite: capitulating to the tyranny of intransigent belief.

And if I remain in the dark about our purpose here, and the meaning of eternity, I have nevertheless arrived at an understanding of a few more modest truths: Most of us fear death. Most of us yearn to comprehend how we got here, and why – which is to say, most of us ache to know the love of our creator. And we will no doubt feel that ache, most of us, for as long as we happen to be alive.⁶⁶

This quote shows what post-modern thinking looks like and also what post-modern thinking longs for. In the next section we will ask how we can preach to this culture.

⁶⁶ John Krakauer, Under the Banner of Heaven (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 341.

PART TWO

How can we preach in a post-modern culture?

We begin part two with a book that does not deal directly with post-modernism but which does deal with how a Christian should interact with the world around her. This book is entitled Christ and Culture, and it is written by H. Richard Niebuhr. This is an excellent book for understanding the basic responses of Christians to society. Niebuhr gives five basic approaches of Christianity to culture. His five approaches provide a framework for understanding how we can respond to culture. Niebuhr shows how Christianity and culture have related in the past, and he helps us think about how this should continue. Although written in 1951 this book is helpful for thinking through how Christians should respond to the post-modern culture.⁶⁷

The foundation of preaching in postmodern culture must always be the authority of the Bible. One excellent book that will help preachers preach expository messages is Biblical Preaching by Haddon Robinson. In this book Robinson explains the basics of writing a biblical sermon that communicates to the needs of the congregation. Robinson encourages preachers to be biblical and to show how the biblical message applies to our lives. This book is timeless, and it shows us how to communicate God's truth in any culture.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (San Francisco, Harper, 1951)

⁶⁸ Haddon W. Robinson, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001)

The next book we will look at is The Emerging Church by Dan Kimball. In this book the author discusses emerging culture and what kinds of churches are emerging in this culture.

Kimball suggests several guides for preaching. First, we must be aware of the starting point of the listeners. Kimball begins a chapter on preaching by retelling a part of the story of The Lord of the Rings. If one is unfamiliar with the context, the part of the story that you hear makes no sense. Kimball makes the point here that when preaching we need to remember to tell the part of the story we are dealing with clearly, and we must continually show people the larger context. We cannot assume people know the story; we must begin where they are at.⁶⁹

Second, Kimball states that we must regain our voice by earning the trust of our hearers. We need to work together with people and build trusting relationships. Although we can't have a close relationship with each person in the congregation when we preach, if we have a good relationship with many people it will show in our preaching.⁷⁰

Third, Kimball encourages preachers to constantly tell and retell the grand story of God and people. Kimball states that many do not know the story, and we must constantly paint the big picture of the Bible story in as many ways as possible through preaching.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Dan Kimball, The Emerging Church, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 171, 172.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 228, 229.

⁷¹ Ibid. 177.

Fourth, Kimball encourages preachers to preach with depth. There is a constant temptation to preach short, “light” sermons. Kimball emphasizes the fact that postmodern listeners have a hunger for God, and they want the message to be clear and deep. They don’t want three quick ways to solve a problem; they want to meet with God.

Fifth, Kimball encourages us to remember the importance of experiencing God in the service. Much of Kimball’s thinking here comes from Leith Anderson’s book entitled Church for the 21st Century. If we get too heady there may be much information but no time to experience God. Preachers must make certain there is opportunity in the service and in the message to experience who God is.⁷²

Kimball’s book is a good starting point for thinking about how to preach in our culture. He understands the current society, and yet he doesn’t ask us to compromise the truth.

Another helpful book is Preaching to a Shifting Culture, edited by Scott M. Gibson. It includes chapters written by a number of well-known preachers.

Chapter 3, by Bryan Chapell, is an excellent treatment of why Christ-centered preaching is necessary in a pluralistic world. Chapell contends that Christ-centered preaching is the only way to respect other faiths because when we preach Christ we recognize the difference between Christianity and other faiths. Chapell does not give a

⁷² Ibid. 188.

specific technique here, but he does give a basic guideline by calling us to keep our focus on Christ.⁷³

Chapter four by Haddon Robinson is also helpful. In this chapter the author states that the most effective method of preaching is expository preaching. Robinson explains some ideas here that are similar to those in his book Biblical Preaching, which is referred to earlier.⁷⁴

Chapter five by Keith Willhite is also helpful. This chapter stresses the need to understand the reservations and questions the audience may have. The author suggests argumentation as a way to handle reservations and questions. Willhite shows how the preacher can make a biblical claim, and then back it up with evidence.⁷⁵ Following this method will help us be more precise in our claims and to give evidence that meets the audience's challenges.

Chapter 6 is written by Don Sunukjian. This chapter gives the basics of Sunukjian's style of writing sermons. Sunukjian notes that in a sermon we must have three basic things:

1. The biblical author's flow of thought.
2. A single sentence that states the message of the text, and
3. The relevant points of contact with the contemporary audience.⁷⁶

The next chapter to note is chapter ten by Jeffrey Arthurs. Arthurs summarizes postmodernity, and he then asks how we can preach in this setting. He states that we must

⁷³ Chapell, Preaching to a Shifting Culture, 62.

⁷⁴ Robinson, Preaching to a Shifting Culture, 82-93.

⁷⁵ Willhite, Preaching to a Shifting Culture, 100.

⁷⁶ Sunukjian, Preaching to a Shifting Culture, 113, 114.

patiently instruct people and emphasize that what we are teaching is not just good but it is true. We must “patiently illustrate what we mean and patiently demonstrate how we reached our conclusions.”⁷⁷ Doing this will help us overcome postmodern resistance.

Next we will look at a book that we will spend a considerable amount of time on. This book is entitled Preaching to a Postmodern World, and it is written by Graham Johnston.

Johnston begins his comments on preaching by noting four rules for engagement with the culture. He reminds us that we must not engage people at the expense of the message. Johnston states the following:

In examining the how of preaching in a postmodern climate, and seeking to maintain both the authority and integrity of God’s Word, three dangers become clear. The first is preachers could lose confidence in God’s Word ...The second: Preachers might stoop to a type of reduced perspective that shrinks God and His truth to accommodate listeners. Third: Preachers might adapt an essentially pragmatic approach.⁷⁸

Johnston then states that the preacher must know his audience, because he is preaching to real people in real situations. Knowing people well helps us to be sensitive to their world. Along with this Johnston notes that the preacher must be aware of how his message will be heard. He must think carefully about the words he will use as well as his tone of voice, gestures, facial expression, etc.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 191.

⁷⁸ Graham Johnston, Preaching to a Postmodern World, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001),

Next Johnston states that a speaker must risk involvement. Johnston claims that it is important that the speaker be interested in and understand the listener's world. The attitude of the preacher toward the congregation is important; listeners must feel that the preacher is interested in and involved in their lives.

Johnston concludes his rules for engagement by stating that the preacher must address the listeners where they live. This means that the preacher must understand and address a deep and real need of the congregation. The author states that preaching that connects with listeners does so by uncovering the area of human need within a passage of Scripture and then speaking in a way that compels the listener to hear what the Bible says in answer to that need.⁷⁹

Johnston then gives four suggestions regarding how we can effectively challenge current listeners. These suggestions are as follows:

- Be more relational,
- Tune in to the secular,
- Become more apologetic,
- Encourage accountability.⁸⁰

Johnston goes on to discuss some of the obstacles to preaching today. In this section Johnston emphasizes the need to respect society by quoting the following statement from Donald McCullough:

The vehemence of the debate over controversial issues – such as language about God, the inerrancy of Scripture, abortion, creation and evolution, the role of women in leadership, ordination of homosexuals, and others – too often breeds arrogant certainty,...Instead of an enriching exchange leading to

⁷⁹ Ibid. 66-72.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 77-85.

greater discernment, we have shouting matches that shut off dialogue and fragment the Christian community....⁸¹

Johnston adds:

People who might have once accepted this proposition from the pulpit freely will now need to see that the preacher has grappled with the full implications of the issue while communicating in ways that invite dialogue and feedback. Truth claims cannot be used to coerce people into God's kingdom; people will have to be led by humility and gentleness.⁸²

Next, Johnston provides what he calls "inroads" to reaching the postmodern generation. The first thing he notes is that spirituality is "hot." Johnston states that postmodern thinkers are suspicious of institutionalized religion, but they are interested in spirituality. By spirituality he means that people are interested in personal growth and wholeness.

A second inroad that Johnston notes is that postmoderns value community. He states that our communities must be places of belonging and of grace. We should emphasize God's grace to us and we should have an attitude of grace toward society. If we can do this we will take a big step in gaining an audience with postmodern thinkers.

Third Johnston emphasizes the importance of authenticity. Preaching must be personal, and the preacher must be open and vulnerable about himself. We must have what Calvin Miller calls "Coffee and Doughnuts communication."

⁸¹ Ibid. 105.

⁸² Ibid. 105.

A fourth inroad Johnston notes is that we must remember the importance of our connection to creation. For example, we need to realize the importance of environmental issues and remember that God is the creator and He is good.

Finally, we must recognize the importance of experience. One thing this means is that we must honor the mystery in our faith. In addition, the preacher must recognize that postmodern people process information differently than modern people. Postmodern people have been trained to receive information visually and orally, and they process information in a more random, less linear fashion.⁸³

Johnston completes his thoughts by speaking of practices of engagement. The first practice he speaks of is preaching with a dialogical approach. In practice this requires the preacher to think of questions that may arise in the minds of the listeners and then deal with them in the sermon. When the preacher does this he is not so much preaching at people as he is leading them through the process of understanding. The preacher is seen then less as an authority figure and more as a guide.

Second Johnston advocates inductive preaching. By this he means that the preacher lays out the evidence and postpones the statement of the big idea until later in the sermon. This method involves the listener in the learning, and it gives him the opportunity to hear the evidence and draw his own conclusions. Inductive preaching also provides suspense.

⁸³ Ibid. 86-119

Third Johnston recommends storytelling. Here the author promotes storytelling and then gives six excellent guidelines on how to tell stories. Johnston states that stories have power because they draw people in. People identify with the characters of the story, and they understand things in a non- threatening and fresh way.

Fourth Johnston advocates the use of audiovisuals, drama and art. This is helpful because post-modern listeners are used to images and the language of image is one that they understand well.

Fifth Johnston advocates the use of humor. He states that humor can help people to look at issues and themselves from a new angle. Humor can also loosen people up to hear hard truth.

Sixth Johnston reminds us to be good listeners. This involves listening before, during and after sermons. Preachers must be aware of and think carefully about what people are saying.

Finally, Johnston encourages pastors to be crisp and clear in our delivery. He explains that we need to move at a proper pace and that we must be clear about what we want to say.⁸⁴

In this book Johnston lays the issues out well, and he gives solutions that are practical and helpful. His book could be the main “textbook” for this thesis.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 119-172.

Some similar thoughts were expressed on tapes of a conference entitled “Preaching Truth in a Whatever World” sponsored by Preaching Magazine. Dr. Michael Duduit did most of the speaking at this conference.⁸⁵

David Henderson in, *Culture Shift*, follows his insightful description of current culture by giving some useful guidelines for how to preach in our current culture. He states, for example, that it is possible for the preacher to show how God’s guidelines are helpful without really pointing a person to God. Henderson shows that preachers must describe the grand story of what God is doing and what his call on our life means. When we do this we give the context, the full picture, of God’s guidelines.⁸⁶ This can help postmodern people accept God’s truth because it shows them the context.

Henderson also encourages the preacher to understand her world well. He says that we must be able to answer questions such as: What drives the world around you? How do people spend their time and money? Henderson contends that when we know people’s hearts we learn how to speak their language; we learn where our interests and experience overlap with theirs. Knowing what we have in common with people helps us speak biblical truth in a way that makes sense to them. At the same time, when we live close to people they begin to see us as people with real struggles and with a faith that is big enough to provide real answers in our challenging world.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Michael Duduit, “Preaching Truth in a Whatever World,” Sponsored by *Preaching Magazine*, (Fall ’04)

⁸⁶ Henderson, *Culture Shift*, 27, 28.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 40, 41.

Curtis Chang also gives an interesting perspective in his book entitled Engaging Unbelief. Chang oversees campus ministry for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Tufts, MIT and Harvard. He was born in Taiwan and graduated from Harvard University.

In this book Chang spoke of a principle that he claims both Augustine and Aquinas used when they addressed the culture of their day. Augustine and Aquinas entered the world of their culture, found the flaw in it, and then redeemed the story with the greater story of the Gospel. This is what much of the current literature encourages preachers to do in order to communicate to postmodern culture.⁸⁸

Another important book on the subject of practice is Making Sense of Church by Spencer Burke and Colleen Pepper. This book speaks about the changing role of the leaders/pastors in churches in our postmodern culture. The authors give seven metaphors that help us understand the changes that will be necessary.

They state that we must move from:

1. Tour Guide to Traveler
2. Teacher to Facilitator
3. Hero to Human
4. Consumer to Steward
5. Retailer to Wholesaler
6. Adversary to Ally
7. Warrior to Gardener⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Curtis Chang, Engaging Unbelief (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ Spencer Burke and Colleen Pepper, Making Sense of Church, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

This book helped me think about who the preacher is. The authors do not give specific instruction on how to write and deliver sermons on objective truth, but they speak volumes on how a preacher should think about himself.

Craig A. Loscalzo in his book Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World makes five statements about what preaching can provide in the postmodern world. Loscalzo claims that preaching can provide

- Mystery in an age of information.
- Hope in an era of skepticism.
- Confidence in a time of doubt.
- Truth in a climate of Relativism.
- Jesus Christ to a postmodern world that needs him.⁹⁰

This book is helpful by showing clearly the needs that this society has and how the Christian message can meet those needs. Loscalzo says that we should carefully and gently explain how the Gospel provides for our needs. He encourages preachers to explain what they believe and why they believe it by giving a thoughtful presentation of the Christian faith.

Loscalzo emphasizes the value of apologetic preaching. He says,

The preacher's ideal role resides in giving meaning. Apologetic preaching helps people grasp the world theologically, to bring theological meaning and understanding to their lives... To further clarify what is meant by "apologetic preaching" I am suggesting biblical preaching that grapples with doubts, unpacks Christian assumptions, and contemplates the unbelief of the skeptic.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Craig Loscalzo, Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2000)

⁹¹ Ibid. 81, 82.

In an article in the Calvin Theological Seminary Forum, Dr. John Cooper says something similar. Dr. Cooper reminds us that people must believe that it is acceptable to claim to have truth before they will consider whether the Gospel is truth. He shows how apologetics has been and continues to be important in our postmodern, pluralistic culture.⁹²

Another article that speaks to the role of apologetics is entitled “Reformed Evangelism and the Postmodern Challenge.” The article is written by Dr. Peter Tuit who is a Professor of Missions at Calvin Theological Seminary. Dr. Tuit’s article is written with evangelism in mind, but his ideas apply to preaching. He reminds us that we need to depend completely on the Holy Spirit as we tell people the truth about Jesus. Yet at the same time he states that when we speak to someone we must understand their experience and take them seriously. When we come to the point where we have to confront the person Tuit reminds us that we must do this by carefully explaining the Gospel.⁹³

One book that is especially helpful is A Voice in the Wilderness. This book includes writings from Steve Brown, Haddon Robinson, and William Willimon, and some chapters spoke powerfully to the subject of this project.

One chapter by Robinson shows that, when preaching objective truth, we have a responsibility to remember how people feel. Robinson listed the desires of each person sitting in the church as follows:

⁹² John W. Cooper, “Giving a Reason for the Faith: Apologetics and Evangelism in the Postmodern Culture,” *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, Fall 2005, 8,9.

⁹³ Peter Tuit, “Reformed Evangelism and the Postmodern Challenge,” *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, Fall 2005, 10,11.

- They want to meet God or run away from him.
- They want to learn something.
- They want to laugh.
- They want to feel significant.
- They want to be motivated, in a positive way, to do better.
- They want the pastor to understand their pain and the difficulty they have doing what's right, without letting them off the hook.⁹⁴

Understanding these needs is helpful in preaching hard truth because it helps us be sensitive to people's feelings as we express the truth to them.

Robinson also gives some helpful information on how he respects the people in the congregation. First, he states that he uses a conversational tone. This is important because many in our culture resent an authoritarian attitude. Second, Robinson notes that he shows empathy. He preaches the word, but he does so in a way that is sensitive to the hurts of broken people.⁹⁵

In the same book Steve Brown wrote a chapter entitled "Handling the Hard Side of the Gospel." Brown emphasizes that the preacher's attitude is important in dealing with difficult issues. He states that "preaching is for sinners, and its basis is pure grace." He goes on to say that when people walk into a church they already feel guilty, and they don't need to be condemned again by a preacher. They do need to be reminded that "Grace is real, that it is unmerited, that it is unconditional."⁹⁶

Second, Brown states that pastors must know themselves and that they live under grace. It is important that pastors look carefully at their motivations. One problem with

⁹⁴ Steve Brown, Haddon Robinson, and William Willimon, A Voice in the Wilderness (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Press Books, 1993), 77.

⁹⁵ Robinson, A Voice in the Wilderness, 79.

⁹⁶ Brown, A Voice in the Wilderness, 84, 85.

pastors may be latent guilt. A pastor may preach hard truth out of her own sense of unworthiness. For example, the pastor may struggle against greed and because of that she may preach fierce sermons against greed. If pastors preach hard truth out of their own sense of guilt their preaching will likely be harsh and unhelpful.⁹⁷

The pastor must also be aware of what the congregation can bear. We need to know what kind of a relationship we have with the congregation. The deeper and the more long-term the relationship, the more prepared we will be to preach hard truth.⁹⁸

Even though Brown does not direct his comments specifically to postmodern culture, the attitudes and methods he teaches speak powerfully in our postmodern culture. Brown helps the preacher to examine her emotional health and motives so that she can preach in an emotionally healthy and balanced way.

Another helpful book is Confessing Jesus by David Lose. In this book Lose argues that “In the context of postmodern doubt we are called to confess, rather than attempt to prove, what we believe to be the truth.”⁹⁹ He states that our conviction is the issue rather than proving things with certainty. Lose states that confession bears witness to the essentials of the Christian faith and that it is important that we articulate our faith with passion.

Jimmy Long also gives a number of suggestions for preaching in the postmodern culture in his book Emerging Hope. He notes that, since postmoderns love story, it is a

⁹⁷ Ibid. 87,88.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 89,90.

⁹⁹ David J. Lose, Confessing Jesus Christ, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, 146.

good idea to spend much time preaching from the Gospels and from the historical books of the Old Testament. Long also recommends multiple preaching voices. He states that we must remember that it is really God's Word that has the authority, and God has gifted more than one person to preach and teach.

Long also states that preaching must be missionally focused. It is important that we move beyond our individual life and our church's life and focus on God's mission in the world and His intent that his people participate in that mission.¹⁰⁰

There are several helpful chapters in a book entitled Mastering Contemporary Preaching. This book includes writing by Bill Hybels, Haddon Robinson, and Stuart Briscoe.¹⁰¹

In a chapter entitled "Speaking to the Secularized Mind," Bill Hybels shows the need for a new approach. He states that the secular world is so disconnected from God's agenda that we can't use the methods that we have used in the past. Today when people hear the implications of becoming a Christian those implications are staggering.

Hybels gives a number of practical suggestions. First, he states that we must develop sensitivity. We must understand the way non-Christian people think, and we must truly like them. If that is evident in our preaching they will be much more likely to listen and to understand.

¹⁰⁰ Long, Emerging Hope, 190, 191.

¹⁰¹ Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson, Mastering Contemporary Preaching, (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1989.)

Second, we need to choose sermon titles carefully. A title doesn't need to be cute but it must touch a genuine need or interest.

Third, we must carefully explain the wisdom of the Bible. Hybels states that unchurched people give the Bible little credibility. They will not quickly alter their life radically to obey the Bible. If we can show that the wisdom of the Bible is helpful and makes sense, secular people will be more likely to listen.

Fourth, Hybels encourages preachers to use current illustrations. These illustrations may be from the news or from a current television show or movie. When we use something that is current, people can relate to it, and they feel that they have something in common with us.

Fifth, Hybels speaks about how to call people to a response. Calling a person to a decision for Jesus is a major step in a person's life, and Hybels reminds us that people need time to think about making changes in their lives.¹⁰²

Another helpful chapter in the same book is written by Haddon Robinson and is entitled "What Authority Does a Preacher Have Anymore?" This chapter focuses on gaining authority and credibility as a preacher.

Robinson lists five practices that help him connect with listeners:

1. Articulate Unexpressed Feelings. (of the audience)
2. Admit Complexity. (of life issues)
3. Speak with Authority. (from the Bible)
4. Be Precise in Descriptions.
5. Display Character. (integrity of the preacher)¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid. 27-41.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 17-26.

A third helpful chapter in this book is entitled “Dealing with Controversial Subjects.” In this chapter Briscoe suggests that the pastor

1. Do his homework on controversial issues carefully.
2. Include humor.
3. Present all sides of an issue.
4. Be aware of pastoral considerations within the congregation.¹⁰⁴

Another book that was helpful as an example was The Challenge of Jesus by N.T. Wright. The last two chapters were especially helpful. Here Wright deals with the story of the Emmaus Road. He shows how the people at that time were despondent, and he shows how Jesus was the answer to their need. He goes on to show that many post-modern people are despondent, and Jesus can give hope to them. These chapters are a helpful example of how we can preach in a postmodern world.¹⁰⁵

One book that approaches preaching from a different angle is Preaching Re-Imagined by Doug Pagitt. In this book Pagitt states that preaching in churches often becomes what he calls “speaching.” He defines speaching as follows:

The “speaker” stands in front of the “audience.” The speaker is the only one with a microphone and therefore the only one with the power to speak on the subject at hand. The content of the speech has been decided on with little, if any, input from those who are hearing the speech, and the conclusions drawn are those drawn by the speaker and no one else.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 79-86.

¹⁰⁵ N.T. Wright, The Challenge of Jesus, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 150-197.

¹⁰⁶ Doug Pagitt, Preaching Re-Imagined, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 48.

Pagitt feels that this is unhealthy and he recommends what he calls, “Progressional Implicatory Preaching,” or sometimes, “Progressional Dialogue.” Pagitt says,

Progressional dialogue, ..., involves the intentional interplay of multiple viewpoints that leads to unexpected and unforeseen ideas. The message will change depending on who is present and who says what. This kind of preaching is dynamic in the sense that the outcome is determined on the spot by the participants.¹⁰⁷

Pagitt makes a good point when he states the dangers of preaching being a one-way event. If we fail to listen to people we can preach truth without seeing their faces or feeling their needs. If we fail to listen to people we miss their perspective on what God is saying.

I believe, however, that Pagitt’s conclusions are wrong. Preaching in the traditional sense does not have to be a one-way event. It is possible for the preacher to listen to people. Also, there is truth in the Bible, and, although we might hear it differently, there is a central idea that needs to be told. If we only have a discussion the church may miss the main idea of the text. We can adjust preaching to the postmodern culture, but we must also retain the essence of expository preaching.¹⁰⁸

Another book that is informative by way of example is, Refining Your Style, by Dave Stone. In this book Stone highlights current preachers who are effective and he then identifies the style that this person uses. Stone highlights people such as: Charles Colson,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 52.

¹⁰⁸ It is helpful to have pre-sermon reflection groups so that a dialogue happens before the message is finalized. In this way dialogue happens and yet the preacher can still deliver an expository sermon.

Erwin McManus, Max Lucado, and Franklin Graham. The beauty of this book is that it gives real life examples of some of the skills we have spoken of. In addition, this book includes interviews that help the reader understand the speakers and the styles they use.¹⁰⁹

We conclude our list of current books by returning to a book referred to earlier. Chris Altmann in, Preaching to Pluralists, explains some effective ways to preach truth to a postmodern audience. Two highlights in the book are Altmann's focus on imagination and inductive preaching. Altmann recommends that the preacher use imaginative picture language that draws the listener in. When the preacher uses imaginative language the listener has the opportunity to experience God rather than to simply learn about him.¹¹⁰ When postmodern people experience truth they are much more likely to take it seriously.

Altmann also recommends inductive preaching. He describes an inductive sermon as one which moves from the particular observations and experiences to major conclusions. Inductive preaching then creates an experience for the listener by inviting him to participate in drawing the conclusion. Inductive preaching is effective in postmodern culture because it allows the listener to participate in drawing the conclusion and, by doing this; it creates its own authority.¹¹¹

Many articles have also been helpful. First I note an article in the July 2005 Preaching Magazine titled "Talking Preaching." This article is made up of selected

¹⁰⁹ Dave Stone, Refining Your Style, (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing Inc. 2004)

¹¹⁰ Altmann, Preaching to Pluralists, 131.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 132, 133.

excerpts from interviews that have been published in *Preaching Magazine* over the past two decades. Many preachers interviewed stated the importance of expository preaching. I note here some other highlights.

Steve Brown spoke about humility and vulnerability in the pulpit. He says,

I usually sat on a bar stool and taught. It was a statement: “Guys, as I teach you this stuff, you need to know that I’m placing myself under the authority of God’s Word, too. I’ve worked through some of this, I’ll be honest when I’m not living it. I’ll tell you where I am living it. I’ll tell you what’s helped me and made the difference. But above all, this is revealed propositional truth and we don’t have the freedom to change it.”¹¹²

Lloyd John Ogilvie stated the importance of passion in preaching. He stated that enthusiasm and passion are important in our churches today. It is important that we have a conversational style but we must still preach with passion and conviction.

Ed Young Jr. said that church should be “consistently inconsistent.” He stated the following: “The higher the predictability the lower the connectivity.” Pastor Young calls us to be consistent in our theology and our approaches to God’s Word, but unpredictable in our presentation. When there are surprises people are much more interested.¹¹³

Another helpful article in *Preaching Magazine* was entitled “Constant Change: Where Preaching Has Been In The Last 20 Years and Where It Is Going.” In this article Rick Ezell begins by stating the ongoing importance of biblically grounded preaching. He

¹¹² Steve Brown, “Talking Preaching,” *Preaching Magazine*, July 2005, 2

¹¹³ Ed Young Jr., “Talking Preaching,” *Preaching Magazine*, July 2005, 16

notes two recent trends in preaching: the emphasis on expository preaching and the emphasis on narrative preaching.¹¹⁴

Ezell also points out the emergence of technology, for example, the recent popularity of power point, but at the same time he agrees with Don Sunukijian that technology must be kept in its place. Ezell quotes Sunukijian to support this point:

Preaching will always be effective if it does four things: One, it must have a biblical substance. Two, people must track with the preacher. Three, it must be interesting. Four, it must be relevant. Do all four and you will have good preaching. None of the four depend on ‘whiz-bang’ stuff.¹¹⁵

Although technology is helpful, it is not the source of our power. In fact, when we preach to postmodern culture an over reliance on technology can appear superficial and it can be counterproductive.

The author closes by making two important assessments. First, he quotes James Earl Massey:

In the next five years preaching must have a greater focus on the essentials of the Christian faith. At a time of pluralism in the United States where it is difficult to distinguish between the church and the world, the need for preaching will be to distinctively focus on the fundamentals of Christianity....¹¹⁶

The second comment spoke to the ongoing heart of preaching. The author said the following:

The sermon must come from the heart of the preacher, delivered to the heart of the hearer. Preaching is still a face-to-face and heart-to-heart encounter. The preacher, therefore, must be committed to integrity, authenticity, and

¹¹⁴ Rick Ezell, “Constant Change: Where Preaching Has Been in the Last 20 Years and Where It Is Going.” *Preaching Magazine*, July-August 2005,

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 4

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 6.

transparency. A preacher, who stands on a foundation of biblical authority, speaking to people on real life issues from a broken and contrite heart, will never lack for an audience whether the date is 1985, 2005, or 2025.¹¹⁷

An article from *Leadership Journal* entitled “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age” by Tim Keller, began by defining an immoral age as one in which people understand the difference between right and wrong and then choose the wrong. Keller went on to state that an amoral age is one in which people don’t believe there are moral absolutes to discover. He states:

How did we get to this? ... Today’s postmodernity ... teaches that truth and morality are socially constructed by groups. In short: “No set of cultural beliefs can claim logical superiority over another set because all such beliefs are motivated by subjective interests”¹¹⁸

Keller goes on to say that there has been a change from the past. In the past, Christian teachings were considered narrow; now Christian teaching is seen as oppressive or violent.

Keller states that in this environment we must be careful of two dangers: pragmatism and moralism. Pragmatism is teaching that we live a certain way because there is a benefit that makes their life easier or better. The problem with preaching in a pragmatic way is that it doesn’t communicate the whole truth of the Gospel. For example, a preacher may encourage the congregation to be honest because it is beneficial for their financial standing and their emotional health. This may help people be honest for a while

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 6

¹¹⁸ Tim Keller, “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” *Leadership*, Winter 1996, 2.

but as soon as people come to a situation where honesty is not beneficial they may quit being honest. Keller says the following:

But without the painstaking work of establishing a changed worldview, their commitment to Christianity will be only as deep as their commitment to any other helpful “product.” Allegiance to something that makes their lives easier to manage should not be confused with genuine conversion, which has at its heart surrender to the Creator-God of the universe.¹¹⁹

The second danger that Keller warns against is moralism. Moralism is the teaching that we obey objective truth because it will earn us something before God. Christianity teaches, rather, that we obey God, not to earn something, but as a response to what Christ has done for us.

The type of teaching that Keller advocates is helpful for postmodern people who misunderstand guidelines and authority. His teaching ties obedience to grace and freedom.

Keller ties biblical absolutes to grace in the following quote:

Men and women need to be convinced that there is a God who has spoken in nonnegotiable absolutes; this God is also our Redeemer, He has paid the price of our failure. Only in this context does the preaching of morality make sense. Today, only in this context can it be heard at all.¹²⁰

Another article in *Leadership Journal* is entitled “Saying the Hard Stuff.” The author, Gordon Macdonald, makes two statements regarding how we can say hard things. First we need to say hard things out of a great amount of love. Second, we must say the hard stuff from the position of solid ground. This means that we must do our homework,

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 3.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 6.

look at all sides of an issue, and spend much time in prayer. It means that we must examine our hearts to make certain that what we are saying comes from a deep affection. It means that we have done an integrity check to see if the same words need to be said to us.¹²¹

An article in the September 2005 Preaching Journal entitled “Sensitive Preaching on Sexual Topics” by Sam Serio says something similar to Macdonald’s comments. Serio gives the following suggestions to help us preach with sensitivity. First, he recommends that we plan ahead and write out the language that we will use when we talk about sensitive issues. When a pastor does this he has the opportunity to hear back what he will say and think about how it will feel for the audience to hear this.

Second, Serio says that our goal must be personal ministry rather than public controversy. This means that we ask how we can build bridges to hurting people and help to bring healing.

Third, brevity and quality are much better than quantity. Preaching about sensitive issues is a time when we may want to be brief.

Fourth, Serio states that it is important that we use emotional language to describe the hurt that people may feel. Some of these hurts go very deep, and it is important that we validate the depth of these feelings.

Fifth, it is important that we communicate hope and healing rather than hatred. It is easy to raise our voice and to sound angry about sin. When we preach, though, we are

¹²¹ Gordon MacDonald, “Saying the Hard Stuff,” *Leadership*, Spring 1995, 98.

talking to people with feelings. They need to know the truth, but they need to know it in the context of grace.¹²²

Two Articles by Cornelius Plantinga Jr. entitled “Preaching Sin to Reluctant Hearers” also give guidelines for preaching about sin. Part one deals with some of the hazards of preaching about sin.

Plantinga draws the following conclusions:

1. We should preach on sin regularly.
2. We should preach on sin truthfully and in a way that deals fairly with all sin.
3. We should preach on sin with grace.
4. We should preach about sin with a light seriousness.
5. We should preach about sin shrewdly.
6. We should preach about sin with boldness and humility.¹²³

Plantinga followed with a second article in which he addressed specific sins. In the second article Plantinga gave an insightful model of how to preach about sin.¹²⁴

Brad Smith in his Doctor of Ministry thesis entitled, *Preaching that Mobilizes a Church Community to Reach an Unchurched Postmodern Community for Christ*, provided helpful insights on preaching to a post-modern culture.

One helpful thought is Smith’s emphasis on the importance of asking good questions. He notes that in the modern era we wanted to make a planned presentation. In the postmodern era it will be more helpful to have a conversation and ask good questions.

¹²² Sam Serio, “Sensitive Preaching on Sexual Topics,” *Preaching*, September-October 2005, 24-28.

¹²³ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., “Preaching Sin to Reluctant Hearers,” *Perspectives*, December 1997, 8-12.

¹²⁴ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., “Preaching Sin to Reluctant Hearers,” *Perspectives*, February 1998, 16-19.

Second, Smith explains the importance of identification with the audience. He quoted Craig Loscalzo who states that a very important part of the preacher's work is to identify with the audience rather than simply to impart knowledge to them. Because postmoderns are skeptical of authority and they long for caring relationships, it is important that the congregation feel that the pastor identifies with them. Loscalzo says that one way to accomplish this is for the pastor, during sermon preparation, to ask question such as 'What is it like to be a mother with small children?' 'A policeman when...?' He encourages preachers to ask what these people feel, worry about and hope for. Asking such questions helps us identify with the hurts and needs of the people we will preach a particular sermon to.

Third, Smith notes the importance of imagination. He refers to Thomas Troeger in noting that while imagination has always been important for preachers, the necessity of using imagination has grown in the postmodern world. Troeger states that people today are accustomed to knowing reality through vivid images and narratives of human life. He says that we preach to a culture that is shaped by the mass media, and we must we must bring to that culture a worldview that is awakened by the Gospel and its transforming truth.¹²⁵

In his conclusion Smith states that in postmodern culture it is important that preachers rethink how we prepare and deliver sermons:

For many preachers this will mean a move from rationalistic argumentation to creating an experience for listeners with options of response. Not simply a

¹²⁵ Brad Smith, Preaching that Mobilizes a Church Community to Reach an Unchurched Postmodern Community for Christ, Literature Review.

change in style (from pontification to conversational), but a change in sermon structure (from a predictable 3-point proof sermon to a story form or inductive approach).¹²⁶

Finally, in Christian Witness in a Postmodern World, Poe Harry Lee Poe suggests that as we preach truth we rely on God's power to communicate that truth. We have always been dependent on God's power, but we are more aware of that dependence now because the church carries less authority in culture. Postmodern skepticism encourages Christians to rely more on God's power.¹²⁷

In addition to the informative books and articles, there was also an opportunity to attend a conference entitled "Finally Comes the Culture Critic: Daring Preaching for Postmodernity."¹²⁸ The first speaker at the conference was John Van Sloten who is the pastor of preaching at New Hope Christian Reformed Church in Calgary, Alberta. Van Sloten is a former real estate developer, and he has spent the past eight years as a pastor developing a new kind of culturally relevant Sunday morning service.

The power of this conference was that it showed that we can find truth in current culture, and we can preach about that truth. In the first session Van Sloten presented a sermon that he had preached at his church last spring. In this sermon John had highlighted the heavy metal group called Metallica.

¹²⁶ Brad Smith, Preaching that Mobilizes a Church Community to Reach an Unchurched Postmodern Community for Christ, Literature Review Conclusion.

¹²⁷ Poe, Christian Witness in a Postmodern World, 52-54.

¹²⁸ This conference was sponsored by the Institute for Christian Studies which is based in Toronto, Ontario. It was held in Lynden, Washington on November 14, 2005.

Van Sloten showed how Metallica spoke God's truth in their lyrics. He demonstrated how Metallica's rage against injustice sounds a lot like Jeremiah and some other biblical prophets. Van Sloten believes that there is revealed truth from God in culture. This is a change from the style of some who would condemn culture and refuse to see anything good in it.

There is a need for wisdom in helping people find truth in culture. Obviously there are things in culture that we need to stand against, but we need to be careful about the attitude we have toward our culture. Culture is broken, but it is also true that, to some degree, we can still see God's truth in culture. Van Sloten's way of thinking does not follow a specific technique, but it does express a theology that helps us applaud truth in our world and then show that all truth is God's truth. This helps postmoderns accept truth because they can see that it is part of our culture.

At the same conference John Suk, president of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, spoke about what he considers the best way to communicate in our society. He noted that many people now spend little time reading, and showed how we can learn communication techniques from oral societies in the past.

Suk gave the following ideas for preaching in current culture:

First, since people spend much time staring at a screen and not talking to each other, we need to provide opportunities for true community in the church. This relates to preaching because John feels that preachers can use sermons to help people understand community and to call people into community.

Second, Suk notes that we can learn from practices that were used in pre-literate societies such as rhythm, rhyme, assonance, and repetition. He challenges us to preach in a way that is vivid, memorable and simple.

Third, Suk suggests that we offer multiple choices in our worship services. In preaching this means that we must have a variety of preaching styles because we preach to people who learn in different ways.¹²⁹

PART THREE

How should the preacher live?

We begin by referring again to Bill Hybels' article titled "Speaking to the Secularized Mind" in Mastering Contemporary Preaching. One part of this article speaks to the preacher's lifestyle. Hybels states that at Willow Creek they recommend that the pastors have an area of interest in their lives that they pursue in the secular realm. The area may be tennis, golf, jogging, or other things. They need to pursue this in the secular realm so they can be with secular people and understand how they think. This is an important part of the preacher's lifestyle because the only way we can speak effectively to people is if we understand them.¹³⁰

Hybels also states that the pastor should use current illustrations so that people feel that he is part of their world. This means that the pastor must have a lifestyle of

¹²⁹ John Suk, "Preaching for Postmoderns: Secondary Orality's Gifts and Constraints."

¹³⁰ Hybels, Mastering Contemporary Preaching, 29, 30.

reading newspapers, watching and listening to the news, reading magazines and being alert on a daily basis for current illustrations.

In, “Talking Preaching” Jack Graham states that, “There is no effective preaching without credibility in the pulpit...”¹³¹ This is again saying that the preacher must live a lifestyle that gives him an overall credibility.

Three preachers in the Graham article – Jim Henry, John Huffman, and Bill Hybels –note the importance of being with the people and knowing them. It is important that the preacher love people and be aware their needs.

One of the most important parts of the preacher’s lifestyle is prayer. Ed Young speaks to this in a chapter in a book entitled “Communicate with Power.” He states that when he was in college he received the following advice, “If you ever decide to be a great preacher, all you have to do is walk on your knees.”¹³² Young states that this is the hardest work a pastor will do.

In the same article Young also explains that it is important that the pastor spend a great deal of time in study. He states that it is important for the pastor to read widely and study carefully so that he truly understands the text.¹³³

Following is a summary of the information gathered from the literature review. The intent of this summary is to put the information from the literature review in a form that is easier to remember. This list would be helpful for preachers at any time but it

¹³¹ Graham, “Talking Preaching.”

¹³² Young, Communicate With Power, 239.

¹³³ Young, Communicate With Power.

highlights methods of communication that are particularly helpful when preaching to a postmodern culture.

HOW SHOULD THE PREACHER PREACH IN A POST-MODERN CULTURE?

1. The preacher should practice expository preaching.
2. The preacher should practice apologetic preaching and recognize the complexity of issues.
3. The preacher must provide hope and preach grace.
4. The preacher must highlight God's larger mission in the world.
5. The preacher should use current illustrations.
6. The preacher should graciously and clearly call people to a response.
7. The preacher must identify with the audience and articulate their unexpressed feelings.
8. The preacher must speak with authority and be precise with words.
9. It is helpful if the preacher can include humor in a message.
10. The preacher must have an attitude of humility and vulnerability.
11. The preacher should frequently use narrative preaching.
12. It is important that the preacher use a variety of preaching styles.
13. When preaching about sin we should do so with a "light seriousness."
14. It is important that the preacher use good oratory practices such as repetition.
15. The preacher should use a dialogical approach while preaching.

16. It is important that the preacher often use an inductive style.
17. It is helpful for the preacher to use audiovisual support.
18. The preacher must preach with passion.
19. The preacher must preach a Christ centered message.

HOW SHOULD THE PREACHER LIVE IN A POST-MODERN CULTURE?

1. The preacher must develop authentic relationships with people and be a good listener.
2. The preacher must cultivate a life of prayer and a life in which she experiences God in meaningful ways.
3. The preacher must understand his character and attempt to grow in character.
4. The preacher must spend much time studying so that he knows the Bible and his culture well.

It is important to note that there is also a vast amount of information about postmodernism and the emerging church on the Internet. These sites are not discussed in this review, but three web sites have been noted in the bibliography.

In conclusion, there is much literature on preaching in the postmodern world. This literature helps us understand postmodernism. It also helps us think about how to prepare and deliver sermons and how to live our lives in our current culture. This literature is both revealing and challenging. For many of us this may mean drastic changes and these changes can seem intimidating. On the other hand, when we look at the need in society and see what a difference the church can make, we can see that these changes are essential and that the potential results of making these changes are exciting.

In the next chapter we will meet five pastors on Vancouver Island who are seeing the challenges in the current society and effectively communicating to their culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERVIEWS

In this chapter we move to the task of interviewing pastors. The goal is to find pastors on Vancouver Island who are effectively reaching people. There will be four parts to this chapter:

1. the selection criteria for interviewees,
2. the procedure for the collection of data,
3. a description of each respondent and their ministry setting, and
4. a summary of responses to interview questions.

An analysis of my findings and conclusions are discussed in chapter five.

SELECTION CRITERIA

1. I only considered pastors who are in ministry on Vancouver Island.
2. I looked for pastors who are doing ministry in evangelical churches. I based my selection here on what I know of the churches and on my knowledge of the denominations of which they are a part.
3. I considered churches that are growing or that have grown recently. My goal was to interview pastors who have been impacting people on the island.

PROCEDURE FOR COLLECTING DATA

The method used for collecting research data involved the following:

1. Select possible respondents.
2. Request an interview with each pastor via a phone call or email.
3. In some cases I listened to a tape of the pastor from a previous service.
4. Send a list of questions to each pastor prior to the interview.
5. Conduct and audiotape an interview with each pastor in person. In one case I interviewed a pastor by phone.
6. Compile a transcript of each interview.
7. Organize the information gathered.
8. Send a copy of chapter four to each pastor to allow them to read my interpretation of their thoughts.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS AND THEIR MINISTRY SETTINGS

- Rod Kolke was interviewed at a Tim Horton's coffee shop on December 8, 2005.
- James Prette was interviewed in his office on December 8, 2005.
- Mark Buchanan was interviewed on December 13, 2005, at his office.
- Ken Castor was interviewed at the church facility on Friday, February 17, 2006.
- Dave Marttunen was interviewed by telephone on Wednesday, February 22, 2006.

MARK BUCHANAN

Mark Buchanan is forty-five years old. He has a fine arts major from the University of British Columbia in Creative Writing, and he has a Masters of Christian Studies from Regent College. The New Life Community Baptist Church, located in Duncan, BC, began as a church plant in 1983. Mark came as their pastor in 1995 and the

church has now grown to about seven hundred in attendance at two Sunday morning services. Mark is also well known as an accomplished author. Duncan and the surrounding area have a population of about 70,000.

ROD KOLKE

Rod Kolke is thirty-seven years old and he has been in The Meeting Place church for six and one half years. The Meeting Place holds their services in the Avalon Cinema Center in the Woodgrove Mall in Nanaimo, BC. They have from 250 to 300 people in attendance on a Sunday morning. Since they have ample room they have only one service each week. All of the staff, including Rod, work part time at the church. They do this intentionally because they feel that having an additional job gives them a better connection to the surrounding culture. Nanaimo and the surrounding area have a population of about 80,000.

JAMES PRETTE

James Prette is forty-three years old and he has been at the Lambrick Park church for ten years. He has also spent twenty years working with Young Life. James has a Masters of Divinity from Regent College, and he is now completing a Doctor of Ministry from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary.

Lambrick Park Church currently has 850 people in attendance on a Sunday. They have two morning services and they have an evening service, which is primarily directed toward youth and young adults. Lambrick Park is located in Victoria, B.C. – the capital

city of the province which, including the surrounding areas, has a population of about 335,000.

KEN CASTOR

Ken Castor has been the youth and family pastor at Parksville Baptist Church for the past three years. He has a Masters of Divinity from Regent College in Vancouver BC. The Parksville Baptist Church is located in Parksville, B.C. and has a population of 11,245. In the 1990's the church grew from about 160 members to nearly 600. Parksville Baptist has a beautiful campus and is well known in the community.

DAVE MARTTUNEN

Dave Marttunen is fifty years old, and he is the pastor of the Central Baptist Church in Victoria, B.C. Dave has a Bachelors Degree in Theology from Northwest Baptist College. Central Baptist presently has about 540 people attending in one Sunday morning service. They also have a slightly more traditional evening service, which has about 200 people in attendance. Dave was the pastor of the Parksville Baptist Church from 1989 until 2003.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

In this part of the chapter the responses that each preacher gave to the questions will be given. I note that I changed the questions slightly after the first three interviews. With Rod Kolke, James Prette, and Mark Buchanan, the interview consisted of twelve

questions. For Ken Castor and Dave Marttunen the interview was shortened to ten questions. I have catalogued answers to nine questions in this chapter. In each case the question will be listed, and I will then summarize answers from each pastor.

1. Many describe our culture as a postmodern culture. How would you describe the culture that you minister in?

Mark Buchanan

Mark noted that there are many low income and single parent homes in the Duncan area. He feels that people in his area do not have the luxury of calling themselves postmodern. Mark stated that in Duncan people are up against life issues, and those struggles are more pressing than postmodern questions. He did note that, although people in his area may not clearly articulate postmodern views, they may have trouble accepting God's truth because they are burdened and distracted by the pressures of life.

Rod Kolke

Rod began his answer by saying that there are basically two groups that they are reaching. The first group consists of former Catholics who went to church as children, stopped attending, and who are now rediscovering church with their children. The second group is unchurched, irreligious people who are biblically illiterate. These people may be dealing with addictions and they may be professionals, but they are looking for something to fill the gap in their lives.

I asked Rod if he senses a resistance to truth in the people he ministers to and he said the following:

There is not overt resistance to hearing the truth. They may sit through a series of messages on the exclusivity of Christ and they won't even argue with you, but you will hear them talking a few weeks later and you realize that it hasn't really sunk in. There is not hostility against the truth but there is almost a fog there that doesn't really let the truth sink in.

James Prette

In answering this question James mainly described the people who attend Lambrick Park. He stated that the people who come to the two services in the morning live in a modernist bubble. The evening group is made up of younger people, and they are more postmodern. The younger people like multimedia, they are well informed culturally, and they are often quite involved in their culture. Many of them have a negative impression of the Christian faith.

James also stated that the evening group has pluralistic tendencies. Some of them are Christians who believe in absolute truth, but they are still steeped in postmodern culture. They don't have the same commitment to denominations that we knew in the past, and they carry a pluralism of traditions with them. James says that they come to church with a different understanding of what truth is.

Ken Castor

Ken stated that Parksville is a retirement community. Because of that he said that there are many older people, some younger people, and not many in between.

Ken stated that the younger group is quite postmodern. Scientific objective truth is not a high priority for them. Relationships, trust, a “raw genuineness”, and community are much more important.

Dave Marttunen

Dave stated that Central Baptist Church is a congregation of multiple cultures, but the church tends to have a traditional modern culture. He noted that much of the congregation is fifty and older. Dave also noted that the culture of the city is quite post-modern. He said that there is spiritual interest in Victoria but that this interest is often not Christian based.

2. Do you structure your sermons differently now because of the characteristics of the culture that you minister in? Can you explain how you structure your sermons?

Mark Buchanan

Mark says that he is not strategizing in his head how he can reach a postmodern mind. He thinks more about how he can reach “Karen” who is a single mom and who is struggling. He thinks in more concrete terms, and his goal is to communicate rather than to preach.

Mark feels that community is important to communication. His goal is to create a biblical community of people that will identify unbiblical things in our culture and take them on.

Mark approaches a text with the assumption that it is true. He doesn't spend time trying to convince people that it is true. He feels that people are asking more pragmatic questions such as Does it work? Is it real? In sermons Mark spends time showing people how God's truth works and how it is real.

Mark also noted that he likes to preach narrative sermons. He feels that there is a subversiveness in narrative preaching that can get past people's defenses.

Rod Kolke

Rod stated that it is important in the structure of sermons to avoid using us versus them language. For example, he said that he wouldn't tell his congregation to go out to the world of lost people because they are the lost people. Instead, he would ask how we can go into the world as a light.

Second, Rod noted that it is important to explain terms. He explained that we can easily lose people by using language that they are not familiar with.

Third, Rod stated that they use lots of multimedia. They don't do it because it is fun but, rather, so people can hear and understand. At The Meeting Place they believe that multimedia is one important language of culture and that it is effective to communicate the written truths of the Bible through the media.

James Prette

James Prette stated that it is important, with a postmodern audience, to break down barriers. He begins with the assumption that people may not want to be there and that he has to build credibility. His introduction is important because it is a first attempt to break down these barriers.

Second, James said that it is important that the speaker not condemn postmodern culture. Instead, the speaker must do as the apostle Paul did and speak from an understanding of the culture with the goal of communicating God's truth.

Third, James recommends sometimes using a "proper irreverence" and other types of humor. He uses this approach to capture their attention and to shatter people's pre-conception that the sermon will be boring. He may follow this with a story that relates to the question the sermon is asking.

Fourth, James stated that an attitude of humility is important. That can be achieved in the structure of the sermon by asking questions and by using a humble tone.

Finally, James emphasized that at Lambrick Park they start with exegesis. In his sermons James works at communicating the meaning of a text. He also works hard at understanding the congregation so that he can know how to apply the meaning.

Ken Castor

Ken said that his sermons are Biblical and, in the morning when preaching to the full church, his style is somewhat traditional. He said that he doesn't use a "point by point" style with younger people. With the younger people Ken may sit on a stool with

the youth gathered around so that the sermon is more intimate and interactive.

They may show pictures or videos, and the youth participate by way of discussion.

Ken concluded his thoughts on this question by saying that relevance is a huge issue with a postmodern audience. They need to know that the teaching is directly related to their lives.

Dave Marttunen

Dave structures his sermons for his audience. If he is speaking to a university audience his point of relevancy and his application would be different than if he were preaching to his Sunday morning congregation.

At this point, on Sunday morning Dave is preaching to the congregation rather than to the community. He said that when more community people begin to come to church he may structure sermons differently. Dave noted that he used the same approach in his fourteen years as pastor of the Parksville Baptist Church.

3. How does the culture that you minister in impact the style in which you preach? Can you explain your delivery style?

Mark Buchanan

Mark started his answer by saying that he believes that the congregation needs to see into the pastor's life. He says that in preaching we need to open our hearts to people and be authentic.

Second, Mark advocates a cautious use of sarcasm. He said, “Sarcasm is part of the medium of the age and it has a subversive power. If we use sarcasm well people will know that we don’t easily tow the ‘party line,’ and they will feel that they can relate more easily to us.”

Third, Mark no longer uses a pulpit or notes. He used to walk around a lot but found that that was distracting so now he sits or stands in one spot. He may move around a little, but then he will come back to his spot or his stool. He tries to create an intimate feeling. Mark says that he doesn’t do power point well, but if he wants to communicate in a visual form he will sometimes use a flip chart.

While doing this Mark is careful to make good use of eye contact. He also makes good use of his voice. They have a good sound system so he can bring his voice down to a whisper for effectiveness.

Rod Kolke

First, Rod stated that he thinks carefully about his tone of voice and the way he dresses. The leaders at The Meeting Place also make certain that messages are no longer than twenty minutes. In that time they try to be clear and use words that people understand.

Second, at The Meeting Place they try to have a professional delivery. They realize that people are able to listen to many speakers and because of that exposure people expect the message to be done in a professional manner.

Third, they use a lot of multi media. This helps people understand the message and it encourages them to hear God speaking in secular media.

Fourth, Rod states that he is not conversational in preaching. I think he means by that that the service is not interactive. Their service is a one hour-long presentation.

Fifth, Rod says that when he presents objective truth he puts out ideas and allows people to struggle with them on their own. He may say something like this:

Here is what Christ said. Here is what it means in that context, and in this culture. You can believe it or not right now, but here are the resources you can have to explore this further. This might be radical, different, offensive, but if you want to really explore Christianity you need to look at these things.

Presenting truth in this way helps to get past the problem that many people have with authority. Since the preacher is not claiming his own authority the congregation is free to deal with the authority of the Bible without the offense of the preacher claiming personal authority.

James Prette

James likes to use a casual tone, especially in the evening youth service. This includes the way he dresses. He works hard in this service to break the ice so that the audience is prepared to listen.

Second, James uses a conversational style when he preaches. James speaks of a kind of cycle that takes place as he preaches. He will put out an idea, anticipate questions about the idea and then deal with those questions.

Ken Castor

Ken states that, especially when speaking to younger audiences, he doesn't "drag out" the message. He also said that he does not write out the message word for word and, when he is speaking he does not use notes.

Ken also feels that it is important for a younger audience to have a visual to watch and to be able to interact with the speaker. Ken says that younger people are accustomed to visual interactive learning, and they need involvement of many of their senses.

Dave Marttunen

Dave uses a conversational style of preaching as opposed to a classic style. He achieves this with tone, voice, body posture, and language. He wants to have a point of connection. He will ask rhetorical questions and approach something from several angles so that people coming from different walks of life will be able to connect. He tries to always have a thematic statement and a point that will engage the listeners.

4. Do you use a different style when you are preaching objective truth involving sensitive issues? If so can you describe this style?

Mark Buchanan

Mark stated that when preaching on sensitive topics he may walk down the aisle and walk up to people to address them. He also said that he tries to be open about what he is doing. He may say, "I am going to touch on an issue such as _____ and I would

rather not be here now. I would rather be home than be here to address this but we need to look at this issue.”

Included in this, Mark is honest about his own struggles. He admits that he wrestles with things that are not of God just as other people do. Mark says that if a preacher seems “a thousand miles up the mountain” telling others how to live for God, that can seem unattainable. He believes that the preacher needs to be real but he also feels that this can go too far. If the preacher talks too much about his own struggles the congregation may feel that they don’t want to listen to him.

Mark also said that he may single out one part of the congregation to speak to when he is dealing with a difficult truth. He feels that when he has a “heart to heart” talk with a certain group, they listen well and the rest of the congregation also listens well.

Finally, Mark feels that it is vital that we remember the sovereignty of God. We must do our best at preaching, but only God can change people. This allows us to preach with confidence and with trust.

Rod Kolke

Rod noted here that it is important to share your own struggles with God’s truth. It is important for the preacher to be honest and real so that he sounds like a fellow traveler rather than an authority figure from above.

James Prette

James began by saying that he doesn’t handle difficult topics differently than other topics. He lets difficult topics come up in the text, and he preaches them in a clear

and conversational way. James also said that the point in preaching is not the authority that the preacher has but the authority that God's Word has.

In addition, James said that it is important to understand our culture. We need to know how people feel about church and what language they use so that we can communicate well with them.

Third, James noted that it is more important to a postmodern thinker that something is real than that it is true. By real James is referring to whether or not a truth works in real life. James says that this generation wants to know if a teaching works in their job, or their marriage, or their neighborhood.

Ken Castor

Ken believes that when speaking to a postmodern audience, the introduction is important. He said that one way to begin a message would be to tell a gripping story about someone who was harmed by not living by a particular truth. Ken said that a story like that could help people see the relevance of a truth and their own need for it.

Ken also believes that we must think in terms of whole services. He said that the sermon is not an isolated component but it is, rather, an important part of the larger worship service.

Dave Marttunen

Dave finds humor helpful in approaching sensitive issues. He feels that humor helps us relax so that we can handle difficult topics. He said that this should not be done

in a lighthearted way, but, rather, it should be done in a way that engages people honestly.

Dave also communicates to his congregation that if they have difficulty with a teaching, they need to fight that out with God rather than the pastor. He said that people need to understand why God is saying a certain truth so they can understand more clearly what He wants.

5. Can you describe your sermon preparation process? How does prayer fit into this process? Do you have individuals or teams of people who help you prepare?

Mark Buchanan

Mark has a creative team that helps him think through sermons and services. Many of these people are volunteers who have a high interest in worship. They help Mark look at things from a wider perspective, and they help him do things that he wouldn't otherwise have time to do.

Rod Kolke

Rod uses the team approach to preparation in a different way. He learns from other preachers and uses their material when it is helpful. He also works with his staff as a team. Since they all have other jobs they don't have a face to face meeting every week, but they do email ideas to each other about the messages.

Rod also noted that evaluation is important. Each speaker gets feedback after each message so they can improve.

James Prette

James also uses the team approach to sermon preparation. His team is made up of people who are involved in different ways in the service, but they think together about the theme of the message and how it should be spoken. James may involve other groups such as his home study group to help him think through the passage.

In this preparation they try to be honest about what they don't know. They try to anticipate the questions people will ask so they can deal with real questions and show the difference God's truth makes in people's lives.

Ken Castor

Ken also uses group help in preparing messages. In the Parksville Baptist Church they have a group of elders who spend time praying about topics for upcoming sermons. Ken also has a face to face meeting with some people every few weeks to think through passages.

Dave Marttunen

Dave stated that he likes to preach from blocks of scripture because it keeps him from riding hobby horses and requires him to deal with things he may otherwise shy away from. He also said that then, if a difficult topic does come up in a block of scripture, people don't feel that he is "gunning" for them.

Dave does not have a formal group that he meets with but he does try to talk to people about sermons before he preaches them. He may go to a group that the sermon

will affect and talk with some of them about it. He may also speak ahead of time with other staff or the youth pastor.

Dave noted that he reads widely in preparation. Some of his reading is out of his area of interest so he can stay current on a wide variety of issues.

Much of Dave's sermon preparation involves looking at a passage to find out what addresses his spiritual need. He first finds out what provokes him in a thoughtful way and he then goes to commentaries. For Dave this process is saturated in a devotional way.

6. How do you continue to develop your skills at communicating truth in contemporary culture?

Mark Buchanan

Mark is also an author and he believes there is a helpful cross-pollinating that happens between writing and preaching. Mark's creative team, mentioned earlier, is also an important part of his skill development. Mark says that it is important to be yourself as a preacher. He explained further by saying that it is not healthy to do a makeover and try to be hip; we need to be authentic.

Rod Kolke

Rod has attended Toastmasters to develop skills. In addition, he is planning to take an acting course in 2006, which he believes will help with delivery and timing. Rod also encourages all speakers to listen to feedback about their messages.

For pastors in general Rod says that it is important to spend time with unchurched people so we know what they think about and how they talk. He also says that pastors and churches have to decide why they are there and who they are trying to reach. Doing this will help them be better prepared to understand and reach their culture.

James Prette

James focuses on developing relationships with people who don't go to church. He gets to know his neighbors, sends his children to the public school and spends time with university students. In addition, James listens to radio and reads contemporary secular books about our culture.

Ken Castor

First, Ken is involved in a Doctor of Ministry program at ACTS Seminary, which provides him with a great amount of growth. As part of that he does a lot of reading.

Second, Ken noted the importance of staying rooted in Christ's love. A third thing that Ken noted is that he teaches as often as he can so that he can have practice in developing skills. Ken preaches to the congregation once every three or four weeks, and he also leads some smaller groups and teaches youth groups.

For pastors in general Ken emphasized that it is important to have relationships with postmodern people. As we "hang out" with them, we begin to understand them better.

Dave Marttunen

Dave stated that he tries to read at least one book on preaching each year. In addition he tries to listen to other effective preachers so that he can learn from them.

For preachers in general Dave emphasized the importance of listening to other speakers. He says that it is important to listen and try to understand, from a human perspective, what skills speakers are using. Dave stated that it is important for all preachers to study their audience, go to seminars, read, and listen to their peers.

7. How do you study your congregation so that you can continue to understand their questions and needs?**Mark Buchanan**

Mark is constantly networking in his congregation. He picks people at random to go out for coffee in order to ask questions.

Mark also gets feedback from his creative team. Because of the size of the team they have many contact points with the congregation and Mark hears what the congregation is thinking through them.

Rod Kolke

Rod studies the congregation through small group ministries. The small group setting provides an opportunity to learn what people are struggling with.

At The Meeting Place they also receive much feedback online from the congregation. Finally, Rod noted that the greeter ministry is important in their church because the greeters are in contact with many people.

James Prette

James likes to have a lot of conversations going. At Lambrick Park they invite conversations on their web site, and they try to have face-to-face conversations. One example of this is a class they sometimes run on Wednesday nights entitled “Everything you always wanted to ask about Lambrick Park but were afraid to know.” This gives people the opportunity to talk about issues that are on their minds. James also learns about the church through his home group.

Ken Castor

At Parksville Baptist Church they are in transition, and they are in the process of doing surveys and town hall discussions to hear what people’s desires are. The elders and pastors are listening to people and they speak together about what they hear.

Dave Marttunen

Dave believes it is important to be with people. He visits people in crisis and in the hospital. In addition he believes that it is important to interact with people in their work place to try to understand what they are wrestling with and how they need encouragement. Dave also spends time counseling people.

8. How do you study the culture around you?**Mark Buchanan**

Mark spends a lot of time observing. He listens to music, watches films, and reads books. He reads a good news magazine, and he scans the newspaper. He also reads the local paper to see what people are talking about in the community. In addition Mark travels a lot.

Rod Kolke

Rod does this mostly through his work because he spends much time in the culture as he is working. He is also part of leadership team meetings in which they talk about the people they are interacting with and what their views are on church. Rod also spends time reading, often from a business perspective.

James Prette

James reads and spends time with people to learn about the culture. He also finds it helpful to listen to CBC radio.

Ken Castor

Ken says that the Doctor of Ministry that he is working on is an important part of studying the culture. In addition, he sometimes dialogues on web sites dealing with the emerging church. Ken also reads books about culture.

Dave Marttunen

Dave believes that it is important to notice the demographics of the city. He said that a pastor needs to walk around and watch and observe, and he should do that with colleagues and staff. Dave also said that it is important to read newspapers which deal with the community and the world.

9. The emotional health of the preacher is important. What kinds of things do you do to stay emotionally healthy?

Mark Buchanan

Mark started by saying that he knows how to play. He takes time for activities such as scuba diving and golf. Mark also said that he limits the time he spends at church, and he has a healthy home life. One of the reasons Mark can do this is because he firmly believes in the sovereignty of God. He can trust that God will take care of things, and he doesn't need to continually worry about the church.

A second thing Mark noted is that they have a counselor on staff that he can go to when needed. Mark feels free to do this, and he is open with the congregation about these

visits. He believes that many leaders are not self-aware, and because of that he has built people around him to help him see himself clearly.

James Prette

James started by saying that he doesn't take himself too seriously. He also has a wife, a staff, and friends who help him keep things in perspective.

James also noted that he lets himself play a lot. He believes that it is important to be able to have fun in life both in our leisure and our work. He added that if he is not having fun something is wrong.

One final thing James noted is that he is still connected to Young Life. He believes this is emotionally healthy because his entire scope of ministry is not in the congregation.

Ken Castor

Ken tries to be honest before God as he is preparing a message. He believes that when he does this he is preaching God's Word rather than his own thoughts.

Ken also tries to make certain that he is resting in the Lord as he prepares and preaches. He feels that if he is not doing this preaching will be strained and the strain will show.

Dave Marttunen

Dave said that we need to think about our role and the expectations of our position. It is also important that we focus on loving Christ and the church. If we are able to do that we are more likely to stay balanced.

Dave also said that we must understand ourselves. We need to know how to be effective and also how to be rejuvenated. Dave said, “We need holidays, vacations, and times of refreshment that are spiritually, socially, and personally effective so we get the rest we need.”

This concludes the gathering of data from the interviews. The goal of this Thesis-Project is to learn how preachers on Vancouver Island are effectively preaching objective truth to their contemporary audiences. The next chapter will examine these responses and draw conclusions regarding how we can effectively preach God’s truth in contemporary culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the answers given to the interview questions. Findings and conclusions will be proposed which will become the basis for the material I will teach in a seminar. This chapter seeks to make major points where there is general agreement between those interviewed. Usually, a finding is included only if at least three of the five pastors mentioned the thought.

1. Many describe our culture as a postmodern culture. How would you describe the culture that you minister in?

A. Finding: Life issues are important in preaching truth.

Most of the pastors stated that it is important to understand the needs and struggles of people. They spoke of being encouraging and relevant and aware of the situations their listeners live in.

Conclusion

It is important to be aware of the needs of people, and this is especially important when speaking about a truth that may be hard for them to accept. It is necessary to teach objective truth but one must do so with understanding, compassion and with a clear explanation of why God's truth is helpful in all of life's situations.

B. Finding: Postmodern listeners may listen to objective truth, but they may not believe that it applies to them.

One pastor said that he does not experience hostility against truth but that it is difficult to get the truth to sink in. Others either said or implied that the resistance to truth is real and happens for a variety of reasons.

Conclusion

If this is true we do not need to be afraid to preach objective truth, but we do need to be careful how we do it. We need to have a good understanding of the issue at hand and of our culture, and we need to clearly show the benefits of following God's way.

C. Finding: Relationships are important for the postmodern thinker.

Several of the pastors said or implied this. This is not to say that relationships were unimportant before, but in the past logical proofs were more convincing than they are now. Also, in the past, people were more individual in their thinking and in the post-modern world this has changed.

Conclusion

Understanding this changes the way the preacher lives and preaches. It is important now that the preacher be open with people and have healthy relationships with them. Without this the congregation may have difficulty listening to the preacher. It is also important that the preacher speak in a relational, conversational way. It is still vital that the preacher understands and communicates the truth but relationships with people are a huge component in the postmodern world.

2. Do you structure your sermons differently now because of the characteristics of the culture that you minister in? Can you explain how you structure your sermons?

A. Finding: People want to know how the truth works in their lives.

Several pastors said that it is more important to talk about how a truth works in life than it is to convince people that it is true. This may be because of a postmodern mindset, or it may be because there are so many things going on in their lives that they only have the energy to think about how God's truth may help them in their situation.

Conclusion

This does not mean that we ignore the logical presentation of truth in a sermon, but it does mean that the focus should be on the application. It is important to remember the postmodern mindset. It is also important to remember that people are struggling with many issues, and the preaching of truth must be done in love and in a way that shows how God's truth will help them. It is not effective to just throw a truth at people; we need to explain it well. I also conclude from this that the sermon introduction is important because it highlights the need that we have for God's truth.

B. Finding: Visual support is helpful in the postmodern context.

Two of the pastors referred to power point presentations or movie clips when they noted this. One other pastor said that he doesn't do power point well, but he may use a flip chart, and he likes to use other visuals such as liturgical dancers. These pastors seemed to think that a variety of visuals were important in the sermon and throughout the service.

Conclusion

Since only two of the five pastors noted that they use movie clip/power point type video support during their messages I conclude that this media is helpful but not a must. Regarding technology I conclude that we should use it if it enhances the message. We should be careful that we don't go too far and expect technology to do our teaching for us. I also conclude that it is important to think in terms of whole services and that a variety of visuals throughout the service can be helpful. This type of support is not a main component in how we preach objective truth, but it can help us to be clear.

C. Finding: It is important to break down barriers to good communication.

One pastor noted that the people may not want to listen to a sermon and so the pastor must build credibility. Two pastors said that a form of sarcasm can break down barriers by showing the congregation that the pastor sees problems in society just as they do. Other pastors note a pulpit, reading the sermon from notes, and the language we use as possible barriers.

Conclusion

It is important to remember, when preaching God's truth, that there can be many barriers to communication. Some in the congregation may not be eager to hear a sermon. Things like a pulpit, notes and language may be barriers. It is helpful if we can be aware of and remove as many of these barriers as possible. This is important when preaching difficult truth because the barriers may seem larger when preaching such a message.

D. Finding: It is important that preaching be in an interactive, dialogical style.

One pastor said that he makes the teaching time with the younger people an interactive time. He does not do this when preaching a Sunday morning message. Two other pastors said that they anticipate questions and ask rhetorical questions in their messages. Preaching this way is not a true dialogue, but it helps to make the sermon feel like a dialogue. It is also true with many of these pastors that the sermon is shaped by dialogue that has happened in the preparation time.

Conclusion

When possible it is helpful to have a dialogue time included in the teaching time. In a Sunday morning sermon it is helpful to anticipate and deal with questions. This answers the questions that the congregation is asking, and it makes the sermon feel more like a dialogue. This is helpful when preaching objective truth because it helps the congregation feel like they are more a part of the sermon. If the sermon does not have the feeling of a dialogue the congregation may feel that they are simply having a truth imposed on them.

3. How does the culture that you minister in impact the style in which you preach? Can you explain your delivery style?

A. Finding: In a post-modern setting it is important that the pastor be open about his own life.

This was stated in a variety of ways by several of the pastors. The congregation will be more willing to listen to a pastor who speaks as a fellow traveler than a pastor who speaks as though he is an authority figure far above the congregation. This needs to

be kept in balance. If the pastor shares too many problems the congregation may think that he is too troubled to listen to.

Conclusion

It is vital that the pastor share his own struggles. This helps the pastor seem less like an authority figure. It also helps the congregation see that the pastor is communicating honestly. When the congregation sees this they will be more willing to listen to difficult truth.

B. Finding: It is helpful to communicate truth in a conversational style.

Four of the pastors said, in a variety of ways, that they use a conversational style in preaching. A conversational style is helpful because it gets past the issue that many people have with authority. If the preacher uses a conversational style the congregation is more likely to feel like they are part of a dialogue. They may almost feel like they are in an intimate setting such as the preacher's living room and having coffee.

Conclusion

A conversational style communicates better in a postmodern context than an authoritarian style. A conversational style can be achieved by anticipating and dealing with questions, having a friendly tone of voice, and controlling our volume. Preaching without a pulpit and notes is also an important part of a conversational style. It is helpful for the preacher to have the attitude that he wants to communicate something good rather than force something onto people. If the preacher tries to simply develop a strategy to

convince people of something they will see through it. A conversational style must come out of an honest desire to communicate.

C. Finding: It is important to point out that, in preaching, we are dealing with God's authority.

Three of the pastors noted that they make it clear that the congregation needs to deal with God's authority in their lives. They clearly state that the teaching might be different than what the congregation is used to, and it may even seem offensive, but these truths are also something that the congregation must look at conscientiously if they wish to take Christianity seriously. Again, this gets past authority issues that people may have with the pastor.

Conclusion

This finding recognizes that the preacher is human like everyone else. It also recognizes that a sermon has authority only because it is God's Word. This has always been a good practice and that it is especially effective for preaching truth in the postmodern world.

4. Do you use a different style when you are preaching objective truth involving sensitive issues? If so can you describe this style?

A. Finding: It is important that we understand contemporary culture.

Most of the pastors said that we need to understand our culture in order to communicate effectively. Pastors noted several ways this can happen such as being with

people, reading books and newspapers, watching movies, and observing our communities.

Conclusion

This finding seems obvious, and yet it is one that is easy to ignore. Pastors can easily get caught up in study and the church culture and they can lose touch with the wider culture. This finding challenges the pastor to know the culture and to ask who he is talking to as he prepares messages.

B. Finding: Humor is helpful in communicating difficult truth.

Humor helps people relax so that they are better prepared to handle difficult topics. Sometimes the humor may be direct and sometimes it may be in the form of sarcasm or, as one preacher put it, a “proper irreverence.”

Conclusion

I conclude that humor that is done well can be helpful in communicating difficult truth. It is also important that we remember some cautions. First, if humor is used too much or timed badly it can seem inappropriate and offensive. Second, if humor is used it must be done well. If it is done badly it can cause the congregation to feel nervous. If either of these things happens humor can take away from our ability to communicate.

- 5. Can you describe your sermon preparation process? How does prayer fit into this process? Do you have individuals or teams of people who help you prepare?**

A. Finding: A creative team is helpful in sermon preparation.

A creative team helps the preacher by giving him ideas he wouldn't think of on his own. Based on the answers the pastors gave this can be accomplished in a variety of ways.

Conclusion

It seems that a creative team helps the pastor by giving him ideas and support. With regard to difficult truth, the creative team can help by giving the preacher a broader idea of how people might respond to the teaching and what questions they may have.

B. Finding: It is helpful for the preacher to read widely.

This has been mentioned before, but it was noted often enough that I have listed it separately. Reading is a vital part of the preaching process.

Conclusion

Reading widely helps the preacher to be better informed and to understand people better. It is helpful for the preacher to read Christian and secular material. When the preacher reads widely so that he understands culture she gains the respect of the audience and she knows better how to apply God's truth.

6. How do you continue to develop your skills at communicating truth in contemporary culture?

A. Finding: It is important for preachers to continually seek further training.

All of the preachers agreed that preachers need some form of further training. They suggested a variety of ways this can happen such as seminars, learning from peers, advanced education, and listening to tapes of other preachers.

Conclusion

Preaching is always a learning process. The preacher needs to keep growing so that he can stay sharp. In addition, society continues to change, and the preacher must keep up with those changes.

B. Finding: It is vital that the preacher stay rooted in the love of Christ.

Several of these men stated that it is important that they have a good devotional life and be rooted in God's love. They believe that God's love gives them encouragement and confidence.

Conclusion

This is vital because it is only through Christ's love that we have the strength and the passion to preach. It is only because of his love that we have a message at all. If we fail to rest in Christ's love we might preach an academic message, but we cannot speak from our own personal experience.

7. How do you study your congregation so that you can continue to understand their questions and needs?

A. Finding: If we want to preach to contemporary culture it is vital that we spend time with people.

All of the men interviewed spoke of the importance of spending time with people. They feel that this is a vital part of understanding people and that the only way we can effectively do ministry is through relationships.

Conclusion

Being with people is an important part of the work that pastors do. It is important that when we are with people we listen to them so that we can gain more understanding. This is connected to preaching truth because we must understand how people think before we can present difficult truths to them.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE

After much time spent researching how to preach objective truth to contemporary culture, the last part of this project is to teach a session in which I communicate what I have learned. I chose to teach this material in the Leadership Development Network in the Christian Reformed Church. This is a program in the Christian Reformed denomination that trains people who are not ready to go to seminary, but who want to begin preparation for leadership positions in the church. These people are not presently pastors, but many do communicate with groups of people in the church and some hope to preach eventually. There were also three leaders present who are pastors.

The Leadership Development Network is in session for one weekend each month during the school year. My opportunity to teach was on Saturday, March 25, 2006, in the Gateway Community Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia. There were twelve people present including the three leaders. The class met on Saturday morning from 9:30 until 10:30 and then from 10:45 until 11:45. In the first session we went through a handout (see appendix A). In the second session we listened to part of a sermon by Mark Buchanan, and we then discussed how he followed the methods we had discussed earlier. In the final part of session two I gave them time to fill out an evaluation form.

We will continue this chapter by, first, describing the content and teaching methods that were used in the class. Second, we will describe the process for gathering feedback and then summarize the feedback. Third, we will evaluate the class and suggest changes that could be made in the future.

The content of this class was taken from chapter five of this project. I introduced the session by explaining why I was interested in this topic and how I had proceeded through the different parts of this project. I emphasized the fact that the information I was sharing with them was based on interviews I had done with five pastors who minister on Vancouver Island. I also noted that the findings listed were those in which there was a consensus of at least three of the five pastors.

The handout listed the headings from chapter five with a couple minor changes in the order of which they came. In each case I stated the finding and then gave some of the reasoning that the pastors gave for their comments. I also gave examples where possible. After explaining each finding I allowed time for discussion.

In the second session we listened to a sermon by Mark Buchanan on 1 Peter 3:1-6. Since this passage is about wives submitting to husbands I thought it would be sufficiently controversial. After listening to the message the participants commented on how Mark had used the findings we had discussed.

We then began the time for feedback. I handed out the feedback sheet and asked the participants to fill it out immediately. Because of this I was able to get feedback from each person. We will now evaluate the seminar following the outline of the evaluation forms. Please note that the evaluation form is appendix B.

1. Introductory Questions: Questions 1 and 2

The first two questions asked about the participants' present ministry and goals. The answers given showed that these people come from a variety of situations. The three leaders are full time pastors. Many of the participants are involved in work with children or youth, and some would like to preach in the future. All of the participants who are not presently pastors are involved in their churches, and they give support to their pastor. I conclude that this session may not have been a perfect fit for this audience, but it was helpful.

2. Content Questions

Most of the participants thought that the information about postmodern thinking was helpful and accurate. A couple people were undecided as to whether this seminar helped them understand current thinking better which may have been because they were already well informed. Also, I spent most of the session on how to communicate through preaching rather than on describing postmodernism so my primary goal was not to describe the mind-set of our society.

All participants thought the discussion part of the seminar was helpful. One person thought the discussion was long and several others thought it was too short. Based on these comments and on the response I felt during the seminar, I believe the discussion was well received.

Eleven of twelve participants thought that the sermon portion of the seminar was helpful. One participant left this question blank. I also felt a positive response from participants during the sermon portion of the seminar.

All participants thought this session was worth their time. I was thankful to hear this since, as noted earlier, these people are from a variety of situations. Fortunately many of the findings apply to communication in general which broadens the application.

Eleven of twelve participants said that the delivery style of the presenter was appropriate. One person was undecided on this. I will note that I used little visual support, and some criticism in this area would not have surprised me.

3. Suggestions for Improvement

In this section some gave suggestions for improvement and others stated what they liked about the session. One person noted that he appreciated the fact that the findings were based on interviews with local pastors. The group seemed to appreciate the fact that they were hearing findings from area pastors. Since the people I interviewed were local, group participants seemed to feel that they were getting information from their own area and information from people that they could relate to.

Some participants noted that they appreciated the audio portion of the session. Although the discussion portion was well received, the audio portion gave some helpful variety and practical application.

One person suggested that I include a description of postmodernism in the handout. One of the leaders encouraged me to continue to immerse myself in this topic. I

take this to mean that he appreciated the session and feels that it is worthy of ongoing thought and growth.

One person stated that the use of an audio *and* visual recording of Mark Buchanan's message would have been helpful. Two people stated that it would have been helpful to have more time to work through this topic.

I enjoyed the sessions greatly. If I were to do them again I would implement some of the suggestions that were made in the evaluations. First, I would provide more information on the handout. I would include the definition of postmodernism as requested and some other information. This might help people to remember the main points of the discussion, and it may save time since I would have more freedom to bypass points that are well explained in a handout.

Connected to this, I would request another half hour of time so that the discussion could be completed. I am cautious about this because I want the discussion to be complete, and yet I don't want it to go to the point where it bores people.

Second, I would try to have a DVD of a sermon rather than just the audio. I did attempt this, but if another teaching opportunity arose, I would try harder. Third, I would try to include a movie clip as an example of current thinking while going through the handout.

I will also evaluate the evaluation form here. The first two questions were useful because they helped me understand the present ministry and the goals of each participant. The next seven questions were answered on a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree.

This scale helped me understand how the participants felt. One person was confused and reversed the scale, which tells me that I should have gone over the scale verbally.

The final question asking for suggestions was helpful. It may have also been wise to include another question asking what they liked about the seminar. Some people gave this information anyway, but if the question had been on the form I may have learned more.

Teaching this session was helpful in several ways. I think it was beneficial for the participants to think through this material. It was also helpful for me to put the information for this project together in this way. Preparing to teach forced me to consolidate and organize months of research into two hours. I also note that the contact that I had with people during the session was rewarding.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS FROM RESEARCH

At the beginning of this research I had a strong desire to grow in my ability to preach God's truth to contemporary culture. As I have gone through this process that desire has grown. It has been a privilege to read some of the best literature on how to preach truth in our culture. I appreciated the opportunity to interview five pastors to learn how they preach truth.

Through this process I have listed some basic things to remember in sermon preparation and preaching. This list is not earthshaking or new. It is a list of things that, in the pressures of ministry, are easy to put aside.

As a result of this study I have a list of findings that I will translate into a list of goals. I hope to regularly look at this list and ask myself if I am following through on these things. I pray that by doing this I will be able to keep front burner issues on the front burner.

I also think that this study has renewed my passion for preaching God's truth to the world. As I have thought about how we can preach truth I have also thought about why we do this. I am impressed again with how much the world needs God's truth. I count it a privilege to be a person who has a small part in communicating that truth.

In addition, this project has helped me think about personal authenticity which includes the depth of my walk with God. I have been challenged during this time to grow in integrity and to grow in my devotional life and my prayer life.

Finally, at the completion of this project it is clear that this work is the continuation of a lifelong pursuit of growth in preaching. This project has been a major step in growth but it is not the end. As I have done this work I have gained a renewed passion for continuing to develop preaching skills for as long as God gives me the strength to communicate his truth.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF VANCOUVER ISLAND PASTORS

1. How do west coast post-modern people think?

- They are concerned with life issues.
- They may listen to objective truth, but they may not believe that it applies to them.
- They believe that relationships are important.
- They want to know how the truth works in their lives.

2. What kinds of things are helpful in preaching truth to west coast postmodern thinkers?

- Audiovisual support is helpful.
- It is important to break down barriers to communication.
- It is important that preaching be in an interactive, dialogical style.
- It is important that the pastor be open about his own life.
- It is helpful to communicate truth in a conversational style.

- It is important to point out that, in preaching, we are dealing with God's authority.
- Humor is helpful in communicating to contemporary culture.

3. What kind of preacher should one be in the west coast postmodern world?

- It is important that the preacher understand contemporary culture.
- It is important that the preacher have a creative team to help with sermon preparation.
- It is important for the preacher to read widely.
- It is important for the preacher to continually seek further training.
- It is vital that the preacher stay rooted in the love of Christ.
- It is vital that the preacher spend time with people.

APPENDIX B

LDN SEMINAR EVALUATION

For any numbered answers please use the following scale:

1 - *strongly disagree* 2 – *disagree* 3 – *undecided* 4 – *agree* 5 – *strongly agree*

1. Please describe your present ministry.

2. Please describe your ministry goals.

3. Please respond to the following statements.

a) This teaching session helped me to understand post-modern thinking more clearly.

1 2 3 4 5

b) The discussion that we held during the seminar was helpful.

1 2 3 4 5

c) The sermon portion that we listened to was helpful.

1 2 3 4 5

d) I feel that the description that was given of post-modern culture is accurate.

1 2 3 4 5

e) I feel that the people in my ministry area are strongly affected by post-modern thinking.

1 2 3 4 5

f) This workshop was worth my time.

1 2 3 4 5

g) I think the delivery style of the presenter was appropriate for this material.

1 2 3 4 5

4. Do you have any suggestions for improving this workshop?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Many describe our culture as a postmodern culture. How would you describe the culture that you minister in?
2. Do you structure your sermons differently now because of the characteristics of the culture that you minister in? Can you explain how you structure your sermons?
3. How does the culture that you minister in impact the style in which you preach? Can you explain your delivery style?
4. Do you use a different style when you are preaching objective truth involving sensitive issues? If so can you describe this style?
5. Can you describe your sermon preparation process? How does prayer fit into this process? Do you have individuals or teams of people who help you prepare?

6. How do you continue to develop your skills at communicating truth in contemporary culture?
7. What recommendations would you make for preachers who attended seminary a number of years ago but who wish to continue learning how to communicate truth in a postmodern context?
8. How do you study your congregation so that you can continue to understand their questions and needs?
9. How do you study the culture around you?
10. The emotional health of the preacher is important. What kinds of things do you do to stay emotionally healthy?

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